

# **Direct vs. Translated Writing: What Students Do and the Strategies They Use**

**Andrew D. Cohen**

*A research grant report submitted to the Center for  
Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing*

**Technical Report Series  
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ISBN: 1-881221-43-1

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## **Preface**

The Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing offers research grants that have the potential to contribute knowledge about academic literacy in six areas: (1) curricular reform through writing-intensive instruction, (2) characteristics of writing across the curriculum, (3) connections between writing and learning in all fields, (4) characteristics of writing beyond the academy, (5) effects of ethnicity, class, and gender on writing, and (6) the status of writing ability during the college years.

In 1999 the Center awarded Dr. Andrew D. Cohen a grant for a project entitled "Direct vs. Translated Writing: What Students Do and the Strategies They Use." Dr. Amanda W. Brooks at University of Miami assisted him in this project in Florida, a state that supports bilingual education. Their research was in the Center's category of "connections between writing and learning" and investigated the following questions:

1. What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of writing essays directly in the foreign language vs. writing the essay in the first language (L1) and then translating it?
2. Does rated performance at writing through translation vs. writing directly vary with the target language proficiency level?
3. What impact will the proximity of the L1 to the target language have in the relative quality of the essays in both the direct and the translated versions?
4. For bilingual writers, what impact will varying levels of proficiency in L1 writing have on the outcomes within the two approaches?
5. What strategies do monolingual and bilingual students use in direct vs. translated writing tasks?

Dr. Cohen received his bachelor's degree from Harvard University, and his master's and doctoral degrees from Stanford University. Since 1991 he has been a professor of applied linguistics in the English as a Second Language Department at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. Cohen is also director of the National Language Resource Center at the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition at the University of Minnesota. In addition, Cohen is Secretary General of the International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA). He has published articles on language teaching, language learning, language testing, and research methods, as well as books on bilingual education (*A Sociolinguistic Approach to Bilingual Education*. Newbury House, 1975), on language learning strategies (*Language Learning: Insights for Learners, Teachers, and Researchers*, 1990; *Strategies in Learning and Using a Second Language*, 1998), and on language testing (*Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom*), among others.

We believe that his study will provide new insights for teachers and researchers in the field of linguistics and English as a Second Language. We invite you to contact the Center about this publication or any others in the series. We also appreciate comments on our publications.

Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Series Editor  
Mesut Akdere, Editor  
November 2000

# Direct vs. Translated Writing: What Students Do and the Strategies They Use<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This study explored an alternative approach to short essay writing on language assessment tasks. Thirty-nine intermediate learners of French performed two essay-writing tasks: writing directly into French as well as writing in L1 and then translating into French. Two-thirds of the students did better on the direct writing task across all rating scales; one-third, better on the translated task. While raters found no significant differences in the grammatical scales across the two types of writing, differences did emerge in the scales for expression, transitions, and clauses. Retrospective verbal report data from the students indicated that they were often thinking through English when writing in French, suggesting that the writing tasks were not necessarily distinct in nature. Since the study was intended to simulate writing situations that students encounter in typical classroom assessments, the findings suggest that direct writing may be the most effective choice for some learners when under time pressure.

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<sup>1</sup>Research report submitted to the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing (CISW) and to the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), University of Minnesota, June 2000. The third author of the final report for this study, Melody Jacobs-Cassuto, was responsible for conducting the statistical analyses. Funding for the study was provided by the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Writing and by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota, and by the Max Orovitz Summer Award in the Humanities, University of Miami. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Anne Fretheim in revising this report.

## Introduction

This report explores the issue of nonnative writers attempting to think directly through the second or foreign language while composing text. The question is whether, contrary to the common-sense view held by many language teachers and students alike, thinking through the first language (L1) and even writing out a text first in the L1 may actually enhance the production of good writing, at least at the beginning and intermediate levels. The report will first briefly review the literature on writing strategies as it relates to this issue of translation and will then present a study which explored the use of translation from the L1 or a dominant language while composing text in yet another language.

### Studies Contrasting L1 and L2 Strategies

Most studies that have compared first-language (L1) and second-language (L2)<sup>2</sup> writing have found that there are similarities among the strategies used for the two processes. Both ESL and FL studies point to a transfer of writing strategies from L1 to L2 writing, particularly for planning and revision strategies. In one such study on the use of writing strategies, verbal report data collected from eight ESL students showed that the students used strategies for L2 writing that were similar to those of many L1 writers: engaging in limited prewriting and planning, and using much rescanning (Raimes, 1987). However, the ESL students did tend to edit and correct their work more than did L1 writers. Of the eight students, those who were in non-remedial ESL classes also tended to revise and edit more and to be more attuned to issues of audience than those ESL students who were in remedial ESL courses. Background experience with the target

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<sup>2</sup> The study reported in this paper looked exclusively at a *foreign language* context, namely one in which the language being learned was not that of a community of speakers in which the students lived nor did they have any regular contact with such a community of French speakers. For the sake of simplicity, this paper will generally refer to the foreign language situation under the same L2 label that is often reserved for *second language* environments in which contact with native speakers takes place.

language and with writing instruction in general seemed to have more relevance than did language proficiency scores on the kinds of composing strategies used.

### **L1-L2 Strategy Studies Dealing with Thinking About Writing in the L1**

Among studies contrasting L1 and L2 strategies, there have been those that have dealt with how students revert to the L1 in order to think about the writing task. In one of the early and often cited studies on the transfer of writing strategies, it was found that six Spanish-speaking adults in an ESL program used the same writing strategies for writing in L1 as for writing in the target language (Jones & Tetroe, 1987). Those who normally planned L1 writing in terms of abstract goals or who engaged in global planning for the essay planned in similar ways in the L2. Moreover, for the L2 writing tasks, those who planned in L1 were able to do so in more detail than those who planned in L2. Language proficiency was found to play a role in how much planning was used but not in determining the kind of planning used.

In another small-scale study, the writing processes in Japanese and English of four intermediate learners of Japanese as a foreign language were compared (Uzawa and Cumming, 1989). The students wrote expository essays in which they had to include some given historical information, producing two individual essays, one in Japanese and one in English on the same topic (where the two essays were not translation equivalents). All four of the students had initially reported that they generally used the L1 (English) extensively for generating ideas, searching for topics, developing concepts, and organizing information. Writers 1 and 2 provided little verbal report about their writing processes in the two languages but performed similarly on the essays: providing essentially the same content information in the two essays but simplifying the target language (TL) Japanese version semantically, syntactically, and lexically. Writer 3, with beginning level proficiency in Japanese, relied heavily on the L1 essay, attempting to retain

the L1 organization and information while simplifying the Japanese essay. Writer 4 was unable to produce an essay in Japanese and reported generally translating in order to complete homework assignments. When these writers attempted to compose in the FL, they reported limiting the amount of the information in the essay, simplifying the syntax and the vocabulary, and neglecting questions of audience. The authors suggested that having students try to think through the FL at this level may actually result in weaker writing.

One final study in the category of L1 planning involved responses to two letters by 28 Chinese-speaking ESL students, whereby their responses were planned in either Chinese or English and then written in English (Friedlander, 1990). The analysis revealed that when writers planned in Chinese on a Chinese culture topic and in English on an English culture topic, their plans and texts were rated significantly better than when they did the reverse. Subjects also wrote longer plans and essays when there was a language and culture match. Being allowed to plan in the L1 increased the number and kinds of ideas the students could generate for topics that subjects had dealt with primarily or exclusively in their L1.

### **Translating a Given Text from L1 to L2**

There have also been studies that not only have combined elements of all the above factors but have also included translation of a given text from the L1 into the L2. An example of such a study is one by Uzawa (1996) that looked at both writing and translating processes, attention patterns, and quality of language use. Twenty-two Japanese ESL students studying at a Canadian college performed three tasks individually in randomized order, after receiving training in thinking aloud. One task was to write a first draft of an essay in Japanese L1. The second task was to write an ESL essay on a different topic. The third task was to translate a short journal

article from Japanese to English. The investigator sat alongside, taking observational notes and recording the sessions. The protocols were coded according to metacognitive level attention, discourse level attention, linguistic level attention, and personal comments. These think-aloud protocols were analyzed and then supplemented by the observational notes and interviews, and the writing samples were evaluated. The data analysis was performed by two trained judges for each language with attention to theories of composing processes.

It was found that (1) most students used a "what-next" approach both in the L1 and L2 writing tasks and a "sentence-by-sentence" approach in the translation task; (2) attention patterns in the L1 and L2 writing tasks were very similar, but quite different in the translation task—attention to language use in the translation task was significantly higher than in the L1 and L2 writing tasks; and (3) scores on language use in the translation task were significantly higher than on the L1 and L2 writing tasks, which were not significantly different from each other. Consistent with the findings from the previously mentioned studies, the author noted that it was lower proficiency students who benefited most from the translation task. The frequent attention to language use during the translation process seems to have assisted the writers in being more accurate. They were "forced" to use words and expressions slightly beyond their levels when they translated—consistent with Swain's "pushed" output hypothesis (1985). Uzawa noted that L2 writing may be conducted at the " $i - 1$ " level, wherein students use only words and expressions readily accessible to them in their interlanguage ( $i$ ) and thus avoid expressions and syntax that they feel are too difficult. Likewise, they may try to write at the " $i + 2$ " level, ending up writing an incomprehensible text or giving up entirely. The translation approach was also seen to help at the presentation and organization levels especially if the material has been prepared by a skilled or professional writer. It can, according to the investigator, constitute a

learning experience. Another study involving translation of a given text was a case study of a female adult Chinese-English bilingual, which explored the extent and nature of translation from L1 in ESL writing and problem-solving (Qi, 1998). The subject performed two tasks in each of the following categories: 1) writing an essay in ESL, 2) translating a text from Chinese (L1) into English (the texts presented had been originally in English and then translated into Chinese), and 3) completing a mathematical problem-solving task in English. In each set, one task required a high level of knowledge and another a low level of knowledge in order to be completed. On the basis of think-aloud protocols and retrospective interviews, it was determined that the subject switched to the L1 when capturing the beginning of an idea, when developing a thought, when verifying lexical meaning, and when working memory was overloaded. In addition, those tasks requiring a high level of knowledge were also associated with language switches, and according to the author such tasks may even have provoked the language switches.

### **Studies Involving Mental Translation from the L1**

There have also been several studies that have involved mental translation from L1 in the actual L2 composing process. A case study involving think-aloud verbal report data from four Chinese ESL students revealed that when the subjects found it difficult to write in the L2, they switched to the L1 and relied on their L1 writing strategies to complete the writing tasks (Lay, 1982). In particular, they reported translating key vocabulary words from the L1 in order to generate ideas for the essay, especially for essays on topics associated with their native cultures or on new topics that were very unfamiliar. So in this study, the use of L1 seemed to be beneficial in generating ideas to include in L2 writing.

A case study of twenty-three adult ESL learners at a bilingual English-French university

program in Ontario found that the writers reportedly used the L1 to search out and assess appropriate wording, compare cross-linguistic equivalents, and, though less frequently, reason about linguistic choices in the L2 (Cumming, 1990). The frequency of their thinking in the L1 was found to be related to the learners' writing expertise in L1, not to their levels of L2 proficiency. In another paper analyzing data from the same study, Cumming (1989) categorized the students into three levels of writing expertise and two levels of ESL proficiency. The expert writers in the study were found to use their L1 strategies when writing in the L2, while the weaker writers demonstrated problems in several areas related to planning and maintaining coherence when writing in the L2. Proficiency in the L2 did not seem to affect the type of writing strategies used by the writers; instead higher L2 proficiency levels allowed the writers to exploit their levels of writing expertise when in the L2. The investigator suggested that L1 writing expertise and L2 proficiency combined to influence L2 writing performance.

Finally, Chelala (1982) found that for two native speakers of Spanish, reverting to the L1 in L2 writing produced both positive and negative effects. Chelala's study sought to explore the composing process and the coherence of the resulting L2 texts of the two Spanish-speaking professional women. Chelala identified seven successful and ten unsuccessful strategies employed by the two subjects, and concluded that using the L1 to compose in the L2 was in the case of these two subjects somewhat more counter productive than productive.

### **Translating an L1 Essay into the L2**

While the bulk of the published studies include strategies for L1 thinking about L2 writing and about mental translation from the L1 at the time of L2 writing, there are fewer studies, which have explored strategies involved in producing an L2 essay by full translation of a draft written in the L1. These studies have suggested that translating may bring some benefits in

terms of organization and complexity to the TL essay, especially for students at the lower proficiency levels. One such study involved translated versus direct EFL writing with 48 fourth-year Japanese university students at two proficiency levels (as determined by an oral interview and a standardized grammar test) (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1992). One group was instructed to write their first essay in Japanese L1 and then translate it into the foreign language, English, while a second group wrote directly in English first. The next day the groups reversed tasks and wrote their second essay on another topic. The compositions written in the translation mode demonstrated higher levels of syntactic complexity, showed benefits in the areas of content, style and organization, and had more clearly stated theses. Students at lower levels of proficiency benefited from translation whereas those at higher levels did not. When the students were asked for their writing preference, 77% reported preferring direct composition to translation. They based their view on the difficulty of conveying subtle nuances of meaning when translating, and on the tendency to use familiar words and structures and simpler ideas when writing directly. In addition, several indicated preferring the direct approach because they wanted to think in English. As for the advantages of translating, the students felt that the ideas were easier to develop, thoughts and opinions could be expressed more clearly, and words could be more easily found through the use of a dictionary. The students reported being able to think more deeply in their native language and better express their thoughts and opinions. Translating was also viewed by some as helping in vocabulary acquisition.

The investigators asked for retrospective self-report from the students as to "how much Japanese they thought they were using in their minds while they were writing directly in English." Since 55% of the higher-proficiency students and 87% of the lower-proficiency

students reported using Japanese half the time or more when supposedly writing directly in English, the direct writing treatment was actually somewhat less direct than the label would imply. In any event, the researchers suggested on the basis of their results that at least for students at a lower proficiency level a translation strategy in writing might be beneficial, and that as their proficiency improves, they would switch more to direct foreign language writing, depending on what they were writing.

At the same time that the Kobayashi and Rinnert study was being conducted, another study of writing through translation was being conducted, examining the effect of using translation as a writing strategy in writing for French as a foreign language (Brooks, 1996). Thirty-one intermediate-level students participated by preparing similar pre-writing activities and two compositions on similar topics. One composition was written directly in the target language (French), while the other was translated from a native language rough draft (in all cases, English). The findings showed that participants received higher overall scores in the translation mode than in the direct writing mode. When ratings of performance were broken down by categories (*accuracy, cohesion/coherence, and argument*), the translated versions of the essays were rated significantly higher on the *cohesion/coherence* dimension (i.e., the extent of cohesion as a contributor to coherence). These results may be explained by an analysis of syntactic complexity in the writing, where higher levels of subordination and coordination were viewed as indicators of "good writing."

Studies such as those by Kobayashi and Rinnert and by Brooks might lead to speculation that for some lower proficiency nonnative writers, trying to think directly in the L2 while writing may actually result in a lowered standard of writing than that which can be produced by both thinking and writing out the text in the L1 first, and then translating it into the L2. For certain L2

writers, then, might the attempt to think directly through the L2 actually detract from the production of good writing? If so, this would be an indication that initial thinking about the topic and writing it up in the L1 may actually support the production of the FL despite the admonition that such cognitive behavior encourages negative transfer and is thus counter-productive.

Of course, any such conclusions need to be tempered by considering the linguistic and sociolinguistic relationship between the two languages involved (e.g., is it an L2 or FL situation?), the learners' control of their L1 and the TL (e.g., are they lower or higher proficiency writers?), the learners' motivation to write in the language, and the genre of the writing. An effort at replicating the Kobayashi and Rinnert study with Arab learners of English as a second language (Ali, 1996) produced results that favored direct writing in English rather than translation from Arabic. Sixty native Arabic-speaking university students wrote 60 essays in Arabic, 60 in English, and also translated 60 essays from Arabic into English on four topics during regular class hours. On the basis of holistic ratings of writing ability, direct writing in English as a second language was rated higher than writing translated from the L1, Arabic. So, for this configuration of students in this given context, direct writing in English was rated more positively.

In the translation approach to writing in the TL, past research would suggest that cohesion (e.g., through markers of transition) and syntactic complexity (e.g., clause variety) would be enhanced. Likewise, breadth of expression might benefit as well since writers would be attempting to use a broader vocabulary and set of phrases, consistent with L1 expression. Although not substantiated by the research literature so far, it may be the case that grammar, especially syntax, would suffer in translated writing because writers would no longer be using

only those "safe" grammatical forms that they know how to use in order to avoid what they do not fully control. Always in such studies it is important to determine the writer's ability to be cohesive, use syntactic complexity, demonstrate breadth of expression, and be grammatical in the L1 since any lack of these abilities in the L2 may simply reflect a similar lack in the L1. Another area of interest is that of cross-language comparisons. It might be that those engaging in direct vs. translated writing whose L1 is more similar to the TL would have an easier time.

### **The Application of Translated Writing to Assessment of Written Language**

It has been suggested that language testers make every effort to "bias for best" in their assessment practices (Swain, 1984). Since language behavior is complex and since any assessment of it is just a snapshot in time, the onus is on the tester to construct the instrument in such a way that students have an opportunity to perform at their very best. One way to do that has been to use more than one task in order to assess a given modality (e.g., speaking, listening) (Shohamy, 1984). Thus if respondents perform poorly on one task, especially if it is one where the stakes are high, such as in a testing situation, they still have at least one more opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency.

Although language assessment has over the years included translation tasks, there has been little or no systematic effort to utilize translated and direct written essays as a means for obtaining a more complete assessment of writing. As the research reviewed above has shown, while a translated version of an L1 essay may in some ways be a reduced version of the L1 essay, there is also an indication that this approach to FL writing may nonetheless enhance certain aspects of the writing, such as the cohesion and coherence of the piece, the breadth of vocabulary, the sophistication of clause use, and control of certain grammatical forms. Until

now, no research has sought to include direct vs. translated essay writing within assessment measures.

The study to be reported on below investigated in a simulated assessment context the value of including translated writing as a means of obtaining a more complete indication of a learner's written language ability. In the spirit of biasing for best, an effort was thus made to determine the extent to which students might benefit from translated writing—whether, for example, the translation mode would encourage the use of more complex language than would the direct mode, assuming that the students were working from a presumably sophisticated L1 text. Another purpose of the study was to include Spanish-English bilingual college students to determine if they had different learning experiences with French given the proximity between these two Romance languages, the numerous true cognates and translation equivalents, and other ways in which the languages parallel each other. It was posited that the Spanish-English bilinguals would have certain advantages and that their strategy patterns would be different from those of the English speakers. There is growing documentation of the advantage that accrues to multilinguals (with three languages or more) when they choose to think through a similar language the target language while learning it (Cohen, 1998: 166-169).

### **Research Questions**

1. How does writing a short essay directly in a second language compare to writing the essay in the first or dominant language and then translating it?
2. What do students consider to be the relative advantages and disadvantages of the direct and the translated writing modes?
3. How might the strategies of students writing in a second language compare to those

writing in a third language in direct vs. translated writing tasks?

4. How do student strategies and writing mode preferences interrelate?
5. What strategies do Spanish-English and English-Spanish bilinguals share and how are their strategies different?
6. How do Spanish-English and English-Spanish bilingual students' ratings compare in the two written modes and on language background variables?

## **Research Design**

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study involving direct and translated writing in French was conducted with eleven learners of French at the University of Miami, at the beginning of the spring semester, January 1999. They were all enrolled in one section of an intermediate-level course. Of the eleven, two were native speakers of English who wrote their L1 essay in English and then translated it into French. Two were Spanish-speakers who chose to write the L1 essay in English. Four were Spanish-speakers who wrote their L1 essay in Spanish, and three had native languages other than French or Spanish. Two of these chose to write the L1 essay in English and one wrote the L1 essay in Portuguese. All eleven students wrote short one-page essays in class in response to four writing prompts taken from the Test of Written English. All participants completed a Participant Questionnaire and three Writing Strategies Checklists, and completed a Comments Sheet. Finally, they participated in an in-class, recorded discussion in English (French or Spanish, as they needed) about the experience, their opinions of the prompts, and about their comments from the Comments Sheet. From this feedback, the researchers decided to use for the main study the Participant Questionnaire, the Writing Strategies Checklists, and the Comments Sheet as in the pilot study and chose the two writing prompts that had elicited the best responses.

**Sample for the Main Study**

Out of an initial sample of sixty-seven learners of French from six intact class sections of an intermediate-level, third semester French course at the University of Miami, thirty-nine participated in the study. Students who were absent for one of the data collection sessions were eliminated from the study. Twenty-five of the students in the study were native English speakers, ten Spanish-English bilinguals, and four native speakers of other languages. The average age was 20.6, with 30 females and 9 males. This four-skills course met three times a week, for 50 minutes at a time. French was taught in the TL from a communicative approach, where writing received similar emphasis as did the other skills.

Students at this intermediate level were expected to write essays in French (4-5 in the semester of about 1-2 pages in length). All compositions were written outside of class, without time constraints and with the support of reference materials. Only three writing tasks were given in class, to be written during an exam (two or three paragraphs long). Topics covered different modes of writing including narrative, description and argumentation, so that the task posed in this activity and the amount of writing requested was consistent with the students' prior experience. Such in-class writing assignments were used primarily for students to demonstrate linguistic control and to help them in language learning and in developing writing strategies, rather than primarily to connect with a reader.

**Instrumentation<sup>3</sup>****Questionnaires**

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<sup>3</sup> All instruments are available from the authors upon request.

A Background Questionnaire was used to obtain demographic information on the students' age, gender, and year at the university, as well as language background information regarding the students' dominant language of literacy and self-assessed proficiency in Spanish and English writing (see Appendix A).

This information was supplemented by a brief Follow-Up Background Questionnaire, which was developed to obtain information not gathered in the first round. The questionnaire asked for additional language background information about the students' past course work in French (i.e., where they had studied, for how long, and when) and about any formal schooling they may have had in a language other than English.

### **Writing Prompts**

There were two topics for the writing prompts administered to all study participants, taken from a list of sample essay topics for the Test of Written English (Educational Testing Service). These topics were chosen because they were expected to provoke personal opinion essays requiring a certain level of TL complexity. They were translated into French and Spanish by native speakers and then back translated into English to verify the accuracy of the translations. One of the co-investigators, who was not a regular instructor of this course, administered all of the instructions, questionnaires, writing prompts, and checklists during two normal class meetings for each course section. The investigator instructed the participants to write a short though formal, in-class essay of about one-page length on each of the following topics:

#### Writing Prompt A

(French version) *Êtes-vous d'accord ou non avec la déclaration suivante? Il n'y a rien que les jeunes peuvent enseigner à ceux qui sont plus âgés.<sup>4</sup> Soyez précis dans votre réponse et justifiez votre argument par des exemples concrets.*

(English version) *Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? There is nothing that young people can teach older people. Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.*

(Spanish version) *¿Está de acuerdo o no con la declaración siguiente? No hay nada que los mayores puedan aprender de los jóvenes. Sea preciso/a en su respuesta y justifique su argumento con ejemplos concretos.*

### Writing Prompt B

(French version) *Êtes-vous d'accord ou non avec la déclaration suivante? Quelquefois il est préférable de ne pas dire la vérité. Soyez précis dans votre réponse et justifiez votre argument par des exemples concrets.*

(English version) *Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Sometimes it is better not to tell the truth. Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.* (Spanish version) *Está de acuerdo o no con la declaración siguiente? Algunas veces es mejor no decir la verdad. Sea preciso/a en su respuesta y justifique su argumento con ejemplos concretos.*

Each set of topics was provided in a bilingual format, in French/English or in French/Spanish, in order to make the topics as clear to the writers as possible. For each writing session, the participants were allowed to choose between the two presentations of the same prompt according to their language preference. Native speakers of English and of languages other than Spanish chose the French-English version. Eight self-reported Spanish-English

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<sup>4</sup> The subjunctive construction here was avoided because the students had not yet studied this usage.

bilinguals chose the French-Spanish presentation. Two of the Spanish-English bilinguals, however, preferred the English-French presentation since many of these participants had completed formal schooling in English and were at the time studying in an English-language university.

During this mode of writing, there was no supervision or correction by the administrator, only explicit instructions to write directly in French. While students left no notes or marks in English on their direct writing French essays, there was no way to control for any mental translation back into English. In the translated writing format, they were asked to write the essay in their native or dominant language (allowing for revision if necessary) and then write a French version, which was a product of translation. In the direct French writing format, they were asked to write a draft and then edit it. No dictionaries were allowed in either writing session because of time constraints (i.e., all data collection was limited to a 50-minute class period; see Data Collection Procedures below) and because their introduction would have constituted a new, extraneous variable in the writing process.

### **The Strategies Checklist and Evaluative Feedback**

For each of the three essay tasks, a Strategies Checklist was constructed, based on empirical evidence of strategy use in similar previous research and on reports of strategy use from the pilot data collected for this study (Appendix B). The checklists contained possible processing strategies on different phases of each specific set of writing tasks. For the direct writing mode, there was a checklist for writers to indicate the extent to which they used the listed strategies in direct writing in French. For the translated writing mode, there were two separate lists: one for indicating the extent to which listed strategies were used while preparing a draft of the essay in the L1/dominant language (English or Spanish), and then a different checklist of

strategies specifically related to the translation of the English or Spanish-language essay into French.<sup>5</sup> Participants were asked to provide retrospective verbal report regarding the extent to which they made use of the various strategies while performing the task. In addition to the Strategies Checklists, an open-ended Comments Sheet was designed on the basis of feedback gathered during the pilot study, and it contained a series of open-ended questions asking the students to sum up their reactions to the study (Appendix B).

A content analysis of the open-ended responses to the Comments Sheet led to the construction of a new checklist based on the most common responses (Appendix C). This instrument, known as the Follow-Up Strategy Checklist, constituted a retrospective measure of strategy use and attitudes. Students were requested to indicate on a 5-1 frequency scale the degree to which they agreed with statements about the effectiveness of translation as a strategy, and to supply additional feedback about the experiences, which they had initially reported on during the completion of the essay tasks.

## Data Collection Procedures

### Writing Sessions

The order in which the participants received both the writing mode (direct or translated) and the writing prompt (A or B) was scrambled to control for an order effect. In other words, roughly equal numbers of students had the same ordering of modes or of prompts. Of the six intermediate sections, two small ones had to be combined in order to balance out the numbers.

Directions were given to participants to include an introduction, transitions, and a

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<sup>5</sup> It is somewhat simplistic to refer to “dominant language” since it was not so much dominance as preference of language for writing the L1 essay which suggested dominance in this case. For this reason, we tend to refrain from using the word *dominance*, but rather just indicate the direction of language preference (e.g., S-E or E-S).

conclusion, and to use paragraph structure in their writing. The students were told how long they would have to write for each task. Before the timed writing session was started, they were given two to three minutes to think about the writing prompt and to make written notes.

When the group was writing in French, one of the co-investigators read the prompt aloud, in French, and orchestrated a three-minute spoken activity among paired participants in which they discussed, in French, two arguments for and against the statement given. This activity was designed to give the participants an opportunity to warm-up in French before beginning to write. This brainstorming session lasted about three minutes and was designed to balance out the perceived warm-up advantage of the translated writing mode, where students had an opportunity to think through their ideas in the L1 before writing in French. In essence, the students treated the L1/dominant language version of the essay as a working draft and not as a final product.

Study participants were asked on two separate days to write on each prompt in a 30-minute timed session, according to each of two modes. In one sitting, they wrote first in the L1/dominant language of choice (12 minutes) and then translated the essay into French (18 minutes). While this mode did not provide time for revision of the French essay, the production of a translation was seen as a reworking of the L1 draft. In the other sitting, they wrote on the topic exclusively in French (for 20 minutes), with announced time for revision (10 minutes).<sup>6</sup> The rationale for providing revision time in the direct French writing mode was to offset the advantage that may have accrued in the translated writing mode from writing the essay twice, once in the L1 and the other time in the target language. The time limits for the various activities were determined on the basis of the pilot results. The students wrote longhand, since keyboarding and writing seemed to be different skills, with keyboarding introducing the

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<sup>6</sup> An analysis of the essay pages revealed that the students did not write out any notes or text in the L1/dominant language while preparing and writing the French essays.

variables of FL accents and speed. No effort was made to control for handwriting speed variations.

### **Strategies Checklist, Comments Sheet, Follow-Up Questionnaire and Checklist**

After each writing session, all participants completed the Strategies Checklist specific to the writing mode they had just used: the Strategies Checklist for direct writing in French, the checklist for writing in the L1/dominant language, and the checklist for translating into French. Participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used a series of strategies during the writing task that they had just completed. After the second of the two writing sessions, the participants were asked to complete a Comments Sheet. One month after the essays were written, the Follow-Up Background Questionnaire and the Follow-Up Strategy Checklist were administered, again during regular class periods.<sup>7</sup> One of the co-investigators distributed the two and asked participants to complete them during the last ten-minutes of class time.

### **Data Analysis Procedures, Rating of Essays, & The Raters**

The six raters selected for this study were all native speakers of the language that they were to rate so that they would be the most able to perceive native-like expression. The two native-speaking raters for French underwent a day of training to ensure that they would use appropriately the multitrait rating scales specifically designed for this essay writing task, and the two English and two Spanish native speakers were trained to use multitrait rating scales appropriate for assessing essays in English and Spanish respectively. Their ratings were calibrated to assure that there was consistency. Both of the raters had over five years of prior teaching, with experience in grading essays in language courses.

### **The Multi-trait Scales**

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<sup>7</sup> It took a month to content analyze the open-ended responses and prepare the new checklist and other follow-up questions.

The multitrait rating scales for the French essays were designed to assess four multitrait aspects of writing that focused more on the form and function of the writing than on the content of the ideas: expression (*freedom from translation effect, variety in vocabulary, and sense of the language*<sup>8</sup>), transitions (*organizational structure, clarity of point, and smoothness of connectors*), clauses (*use of subordination and use of relative pronouns*), and grammar (*prepositions/partitive articles, noun/adjective agreement, and verbs*). These rating scales were based in broad terms on scales used in previous research studies to reflect the language elements in writing likely to be influenced by a given topic and set of specific writing conditions (Cohen, 1994, Ch. 9). Hence, while some attention was paid to matters of style, this study did not attend to rhetorical dimensions of students' writing, given that the writing period was only 20 minutes or less.

The specific primary traits that went into the chosen multitraits were generated empirically from close scrutiny of the essays written by students in the pilot. Thus, for example, problems with French partitive articles (e.g., *du, de la, des*) were frequently observed in the pilot data so this category was included under "grammar," while other more traditional categories were omitted. The categories were rated on a 5-to-1 point scale, where 5 equaled "excellent" and 1 equaled "poor."

The multitrait ratings for the English and Spanish essays were designed to examine three of the four categories: expression, transitions, and clauses. The category of grammar with its three scales was eliminated, but space was provided for raters to make open-ended comments. Again, each scale had a point range from 5 to 1, where 5 equaled "excellent" and 1 represented "poor" (see Appendix D). In the course of the interrater reliability training, the Spanish raters determined that some of the Spanish essays that they were rating reflected negative transfer from

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<sup>8</sup> *Sense of the language* referred to the writer's control over native-like expression. This included idiomatic expressions and stylistic turns of phrase – in other words, the extent to which the otherwise "correct language" was what the native writer would write in that context.

the language of the university (English). In addition, six non-natives of English wrote essays in English, two of them Spanish-English bilinguals. Hence, the two scales in the expression category, *freedom from translation effect* and *sense of the language*, were kept in the rating instrument.

### **Raters' Feedback on the Rating Process**

In order to increase the reliability and validity of the essay ratings, the raters were given a set of rater feedback questions to answer in order to provide information beyond interrater reliability coefficients. They were asked to send an e-mail message responding to the following questions:

1. How well did the rating criteria/descriptors characterize the evaluated essays?
2. Was it clear how to score the essays on the rating sheets?
3. To what extent were they measuring what the researchers had intended them to measure?
4. How well did the rating approach fit with the raters' own personal assessments of the essays and the extent to which there were differences between the evaluation they would normally have given and the one that they gave according to the criteria?

### **Statistical Procedures**

Inter-rater reliability coefficients and one-way ANOVA comparisons were calculated for the three sets of raters (French, English, Spanish) by topic (A or B) and by mode (direct vs. translated). Because the English and Spanish essays had only 8 rating scales and the French essays had 11 scales (the first 8 + 3 grammar-related scales), three summed scores were computed: 8 scales, 3 scales, and 11 scales. These sums were averaged across raters by language.

The average summed scores were then compared within and across groups. Paired t-tests were run comparing direct vs. translated writing. Regarding translated writing, the analyses looked at the thirty-one students who wrote the L1/dominant language essay in English, those eight who wrote it in Spanish, and the whole group together. Independent t-tests were also run comparing performance of students writing in English and those writing in Spanish. Since there were two Spanish-English bilinguals who chose to write in English, and there were four students whose native language was neither English nor Spanish and who had to write in English, three different permutations of groupings were analyzed.

In order to relate reported strategy use and task preferences to rated performance, individual scale ratings were correlated with reported strategies on the direct and translated writing tasks (considering as significant all correlations of .40 or better,  $p < .01$ ). In addition, individual rating scale criteria were cross tabulated with the strategy and task-preference items from the Follow-Up Questionnaire, introducing into the analysis the variable of whether the students had scored higher on the direct or the translated writing task. Finally, self-assessed French ability (ability to speak informally with friends, comprehend a fast-paced movie, write a term paper for a course, and give a class talk in French) was correlated with students' perception of the helpfulness of the direct vs. the translated writing modes.

## **Results**

### **The Reliability of the Ratings**

Before answering the research questions, it is necessary to report on the reliability of the essay ratings for the six raters who rated in pairs across the three languages (see Table 1). For the French raters using the 11 rating scales on the 39 essays written in the direct mode, the reliability was high, .92. For the essays written on the first topic in the direct mode ("youth teaching their

elders”), the reliability was even higher, .97, while for the second topic (“telling the truth”), it was lower, .87. For the translated mode, the overall reliability was .89, with a higher reliability for the first topic, .94, and a lower one for the second topic, .86. The interrater reliability coefficients for the two raters of the 31 English essays were lower: .80 overall (31 essays), .56 on the first topic and .94 on the second. The ratings of the eight Spanish essays had still lower overall interrater reliability, .74, with .40 on topic one (3 essays) and .73 on topic two (5 essays), attributed largely to the small number of essays. Nonetheless, one-way ANOVA confirmed that none of the pairs of raters were significantly different from one another in their ratings overall or by topic. The reliability of the essay ratings for the two raters (see Table 1) was excellent, with an overall interrater reliability coefficient of .92 (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Interrater Reliability for the Two Raters**

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Direct Writing Mode</i>	<i>Translated Writing Mode</i>
1. “Youth has nothing to teach their elders”	.97	.94
2. “A lie is sometimes preferable to the truth”	.87	.86
Overall Rating	.92	.89

With regard to raters’ feedback on the rating process, the first Spanish rater felt that the scales for *freedom from translation effect* and *sense of the language* were most relevant to her ratings because she found the main problem in the Spanish essays to be transfer from English. Given what she saw as the writers’ problems with grammar, she would have wanted a scale for general control of L1 grammar. This problem had not been foreseen and had not emerged as an issue with the native English writers. It appears to be an issue for Spanish-English bilingual students studying in an English- medium university.

The other Spanish rater had concerns about reliability across languages, in terms of the descriptors for each rating scale checkpoint:

I do not feel that the rating criteria were very clear. The researchers basically left it up to the raters to decide what Excellent, Good, Fair, Weak and No Control constituted. This is

very subjective, and even when a pair of raters may more or less agree on what these criteria mean, there is nothing to say that there exists any agreement across the languages.

In addition, he felt that the English and Spanish language raters were being asked to do two things at the same time—not only assess the writing skills of the students, but also judge the native language ability of the writers:

These are different abilities that are not necessarily associated. With some of the Spanish essays, it was clear that the writer never had any formal training in Spanish. Rather, their writing resembled what one would produce in speech.

**Research Question #1: Direct Writing of a Short Essay in the Second Language vs. Writing the Essay in the First Language and then Translating It.**

For all 39 students, the mean performance on the direct method was significantly better than performance on the translated method (using *t*-tests for paired samples) (see Table 2). For the 25 native English speakers and six nonnatives who wrote the translated essay task in English, the direct version was also rated significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ). In the case of those eight students who started the translated essay task in Spanish, the difference between the two modes was not significantly different, most likely due to the small sample size. However, the differences were all in the same direction and were of the same magnitude. We note that the students writing in Spanish did perform better in French in both modes than those writing in English. This finding then seems to confirm one of the hypotheses, namely that it would be easier for Spanish speakers to write in French than for English speakers.

Table 2

**Performance on the Direct vs. the Translated Writing Modes  
(using t-tests for paired samples)**

	<u>Direct Writing Mode</u>		<u>Translated Writing Mode</u>		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	<i>t</i>
<b><u>All Rating Scales:</u></b>					
All students (N = 39)	34.23	9.45	31.41	8.42	2.67**
English essay writers (N = 31)	33.39	8.58	30.52	8.20	2.36*
Spanish essay writers (N = 8)	37.50	12.39	34.88	8.91	1.16 n.s.
<b><u>Grammar Scales</u> (<i>prepositions/partitive articles, noun/adjective and pronoun agreement, verbs taken together</i>):</b>					
All students	9.00	2.40	8.72	2.67	0.88 n.s.
English essay writers	8.81	2.15	8.48	2.64	0.88 n.s.
Spanish essay writers	9.75	3.28	9.62	2.76	0.18 n.s.
<b><u>Other Scales with Statistically Significant Differences:</u></b>					
<i>sense of the language</i>					
All students	2.51	1.04	2.20	0.91	2.25*
English essay writers	2.40	0.90	2.05	0.76	2.28*
Spanish essay writers	2.94	1.47	2.81	1.22	0.42 n.s.

Table 2 (Contd.)

	<u>Direct Writing Mode</u>		<u>Translated Writing Mode</u>		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	<i>t</i>
<i>organizational structure</i>					
All students	3.27	1.16	2.76	1.14	2.76**
English essay writers	3.19	1.14	2.76	1.12	2.14*
Spanish essay writers	3.56	1.27	2.75	0.72	1.76 n.s.
<i>smoothness of connectors</i>					
All students	3.12	1.09	2.54	0.98	3.52***
English essay writers	3.11	1.02	2.47	0.97	3.42**
Spanish essay writers	3.12	1.41	2.81	1.00	0.96 n.s.
<i>clarity of points</i>					
All students	3.52	1.04	3.13	0.92	2.50*
English essay writers	3.44	1.04	3.13	0.97	1.61 n.s.
Spanish essay writers	3.88	1.03	3.12	0.79	3.55**

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Key: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ,  
n.s. = not significant

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As it turned out, twenty-five did better in the direct mode, thirteen students did better in the translation mode than in the direct one, and one did the same on both. A cross-tabulation analysis found that there was no significant pattern between whether a student reported one mode or the other being more helpful to them and how they were actually rated by outside raters. One reason for the lack of significant patterns was that for four of the thirteen students rated better on

the translated writing mode, the mean difference was small (within two points or less) and moreover the sample size was small. When looking at just the three rating scales for grammar, we see that there were no significant differences between the direct vs. translated modes (see Table 2). With regard to the other rating scales, when all students were included in the analysis, the following scales showed higher ratings for the direct than for the translated mode: one scale from the expression category, *sense of the language*, and all three of the scales from the transitions category—*organizational structure*, *clarity of points*, and *smoothness of connectors*.

In addition, those students with a higher self-assessed index of proficiency in French (“speaking informally with friends,” “understanding a fast-paced movie,” “writing a term paper,” and “giving an academic talk”) rated the **direct** mode of writing as more helpful to them than the **translated** mode. For the overall index, the F ratio for the one-way ANOVA was 4.93 ( $p < .05$ ) and for “speaking informally with friends” alone the F was higher still (9.94,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, those students who rated themselves as more proficient in French also tended to prefer the direct method of writing.

Although comparisons of ratings were conducted across languages, it is important to bear in mind that the pairs of raters across languages were different, and so the criteria for rating were interpreted somewhat differently. With this caveat in mind, then, the 31 L1/dominant-language essays were rated significantly higher on the eight scale criteria that were common to the two tasks than were the French essays written in the direct mode (see Table 2). The mean for the translated writing task was also significantly lower. The comparison between rated performance on the Spanish language essays and the French essays written in the direct mode was not significant on the eight criteria. The mean for French essays in the translated mode was

significantly lower at the .01 level.

## **Research Question #2: Student Appraisal as to the Advantages and Disadvantages of the Direct and the Translated Mode**

A key finding resulting from the retrospective verbal report data gathered by means of the checklists was that the direct writing mode was not as “direct” as might have been expected. Although the student writers were instructed to write one essay directly in French without translation, just as was the case with Japanese writers supposedly writing directly in English in the Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) study, the vast majority (80%) of English L1 students (N=25) reported thinking in English “often” or “always” while doing the French essay in the direct writing mode. Contrary to the researchers’ expectations, the Spanish-English bilinguals (N=10) also reported thinking at least “some of the time” in English when writing the French essay in the direct mode, and in addition reported less thinking in Spanish than in English, most likely an artifact of being students in an English-medium university.

As indicated above, one month after performing the essay tasks, the students were given a Follow-Up Strategy Checklist based on a content analysis of their open-ended responses from the Comments Sheet, which they filled out at the time they completed the second writing tasks. For this follow-up checklist they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements regarding their performance on the direct and translated writing tasks and their attitudes towards them. The picture that emerged from the responses of the student group as a whole was as follows: at the same time that the virtues of direct writing in French were endorsed, the advantages of translated writing were also noted (see Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**Student Retrospective Appraisal of Behavior and Attitudes**  
**Towards the Direct vs. the Translated Modes of Writing**

*Scale: 5 = always 4 = often 3 = sometimes 2 = rarely 1 = never*

Direct Writing Mode

**Mean response:**

4.15 -- felt that writing in French helped them learn the language.

3.83 -- felt that writing in French helped to focus on French expression.

3.36 -- felt that thinking in French during the whole process was better than translating.

3.22 -- felt that writing in French was faster than translating.

3.10 -- found it difficult to write directly in French.

2.90 -- found it easier to write directly in French than to translate.

Translated Writing Mode

Mean response:

4.44 -- had better vocabulary in the dominant language essay for the French essay.

4.22 -- found it easier to write in the dominant language than in the essay directly written in French.

3.97 -- had a greater number of ideas for the dominant language essay than for the French essay

3.86 -- thought through their ideas more clearly in the dominant language essay than in the French essay written directly in French.

3.58 -- translating the essay from their dominant language brought better organization to the French essay than if they had written it directly in French.

3.47 -- changed the organization of the dominant language essay somewhat to fit the French language.

3.35 -- purposely simplified their dominant language text in order to translate it into French.

3.33 -- felt that they had time pressures to complete the translation into French.

3.12 -- found it difficult translating into the foreign language.

2.82 -- disliked being required to use translation as a strategy.

The student group as a whole reported that writing directly in French “often” helped them learn the language and helped them to focus on French expression. Given that many of them reverted to English while supposedly writing directly in French, it is not surprising that they averaged at the middle of the scale with regard to whether thinking in French during the whole process was better than translating. They indicated that even less often did they find it faster or easier to write directly in French than to translate. So, while it took them some effort to write directly in French, they could see the benefits.

With regard to the translated writing mode, the student group as a whole reported “almost always” having better vocabulary in their L1/dominant language, “often” thinking through their ideas more clearly in the L1/dominant language essay, and having a greater number of ideas, which they had expressed in their L1 essay. In addition, translating the essay from their L1/dominant language reportedly brought better organization to the French essay more often than if they had written it directly in French. They reported “sometimes” changing the organization of the L1 essay to fit the French language and also reported that “sometimes” they

purposely simplified their L1 text in order to translate it into French.

The eight Spanish-English bilinguals who wrote their L1 essay in Spanish reported “often” or “always” avoiding word-for-word translation from Spanish in the translated writing mode. Half of them also reported “often” or “always” having difficulty finding translation equivalents (Table 3).

**Research Question #3: Strategies Used by Students Writing in a Second Language Compared to those Writing in a Third Language in Direct vs. Translated Writing Tasks**

**Direct Writing Mode**

When students’ self-reported frequency of strategy use was correlated with rated performance, those who reported thinking **less** in English while writing directly in French were also rated higher across all scales and by individual scales as well, the highest being *vocabulary* and the lowest being *organizational structure* (see Table 4). Purposely simplifying the text in order to translate it had a negative correlation with *variety in vocabulary*. In other words, those who reported that they did not simplify were rated higher in vocabulary by the outside raters. Finally, those students who reported that they found direct writing faster were also rated higher for *variety in vocabulary*, *clarity of points*, and *prepositions/partitive articles* (see Table 4). So the picture that emerges is one where those who found direct writing more effective were also those who were rated higher on various writing proficiency scales.

**Table 4**

**Strategies Used by Students Writing in Their L2 or L3 Related to Their Rated Performance in Direct vs. Translated Writing Tasks**

*(all correlations significant at the .01 level)*

**All Writers in the Direct Writing Mode:**

□ *reported thinking in English while writing in French* **with** overall rating (-.56), *variety in vocabulary* (-.56), *use of relative pronouns* (-.55), *prepositions/partitive articles* (-.52), *clarity of points* (-.51), *smoothness of connectors* (-.50), *sense of the language* (-.46), *use of subordination* (-.45), *organizational structure* (-.44).

□ *purposely simplifying the text in order to translate it* **and** *variety in vocabulary* rating (-.42).

□ *finding direct writing faster* **and** *variety in vocabulary* rating (.42), *clarity of points* (.44), *prepositions/partitive articles* (.45).

**All Writers in the Translated Writing Mode:**

□ *the use of simpler words and phrases in French* **and** overall ratings (-.43), *variety in vocabulary* (.42), *noun/adjective and pronoun agreement* (-.41), *prepositions/partitive articles* (-.48).

□ *finding it not really easier to write in their L1* **and** higher overall on the translation mode essay (-.48), *use of subordination* (-.40), *prepositions/partitive articles* scale (-.42).

□ *being less likely to find more ideas when writing in the L1* **and** higher overall ratings (-.53), *sense of the language* (-.44), *use of subordination* (-.42), *prepositions/partitive articles* (-.48).

□ *not necessarily finding better vocabulary in the L1 than when writing in French* and higher ratings overall (-.42), higher ratings in *use of subordination* (-.44).

**Spanish-English Bilinguals in the Translated Writing Mode:**

□ *thinking through their ideas in the L1 before translating* **and** higher ratings overall (-.42),

□ *thinking through their ideas in the L1 before translating* **with** *variety in vocabulary*

(-.51),

- *finding it difficult to translate into French with variety in vocabulary* (-.41),
- *finding it easier to write in the L1 with variety in vocabulary* (-.52),
- *having more ideas in the L1 with variety in vocabulary* (-.53).

### **Translated Writing Mode**

With respect to the translation mode, 64% of the English L1/dominant students indicated that they engaged in word-for-word translation at least some of the time, with only 36% reporting that they “often” or “always” avoided it. Two-thirds of the English L1/dominant group reported “often” or “always” having difficulty finding translation equivalents. Among other things, it was found that those who did not report simplifying their French were rated higher on the translation task.

For the Spanish-English bilinguals in the translation writing mode, *thinking through their ideas in the L1 before translating* correlated negatively with both overall ratings and with *variety of vocabulary*, suggesting that those bilinguals who were rated higher overall and in vocabulary range were, by self-account, **less** likely to think through their ideas in Spanish before producing the text in their third language, French (Table 4). In addition, not surprisingly, those benefiting from strategies consistent with the translation mode were also seen to be rated higher on the various scales in the translation mode (Table 4).

The students in the full group (N=39) who reported that it was not really easier for them to write in their L1 were also rated higher overall on the translation mode essay and on several individual rating scales – *use of subordination* and on the *prepositions/partitive articles* scale. Likewise, being **less** likely to find more ideas when writing in the L1 correlated with higher

overall ratings in the translation mode, and with three individual rating scales – *sense of the language*, *use of subordination*, and *prepositions/partitive articles*. In addition, not necessarily finding better vocabulary in the L1 than when writing in French correlated with higher ratings overall and with higher ratings in *use of subordination* as well.

Finally, those rated higher on *noun-adjective and pronoun agreement* were also those having less difficulty translating into French and those who found it faster to write directly in French. Those who reported not feeling that they thought well in their L1 were also those rated higher on the *prepositions/partitive articles* scale.

#### **Question #4: Interrelationships among Strategies and Mode Preferences**

The following results are based on responses to the retrospective strategy and attitude questionnaire given to the students one month after they had completed the two writing tasks.

(See Table 5 for a complete list of findings.)

##### **Direct Writing Mode**

If students were more likely to think that direct writing was **better**, they also found direct writing to be **easier** than the translated writing approach, were more likely **not** to find writing directly in French to be difficult, reported writing faster in the direct mode than in the translated one, and were more likely to think that direct writing helped them learn the language. In addition, writing faster in the direct mode correlated negatively with difficulty in direct writing, which meant that those writing faster in that mode also encountered difficulties in direct writing less frequently. Those students who felt most strongly that direct writing helped them to focus on French expression were also those who reported that direct thinking in French was better than thinking through the L1 first and also felt that direct writing in French helped them in learning

French. Finally, those who reported that direct writing was easier for them than translated writing were also those who tended not to have difficulty translating into French, tended not to purposely simplifying in order to translate, and could write faster in direct writing.

### **Translated Writing Mode**

Students who held the view that they *thought through ideas more clearly in the dominant language* than in the direct writing mode were also those who felt the following: it was easier to write in the L1, they had more ideas in the L1, it was difficult to write directly in French, it was not faster for them to write in the direct mode, and they had better vocabulary in the L1.

Those who reported it being *easier to write in the dominant language* (English or Spanish) also reported that they could think through their ideas more clearly in the L1, purposely simplified their L1 text in order to translate it into French, tended not to find direct writing in French easier, tended to find it difficult to write directly, tended not to find direct writing faster, and had a better vocabulary in the L1.

Those who reported having *more ideas when writing in the dominant language* also reported that they had a better vocabulary in the L1, simplified their L1 text in order to translate it into French, and tended not to find direct writing faster. Those who reported having *more vocabulary when writing in the dominant language* also reported that they did not tend to write faster in the direct mode. Those who reported difficulty in translating also were those more concerned about the time pressure and less likely to find direct writing in French faster. Those who simplified their L1 text in order to translate it into French also reported encountering difficulty in translating and tended not to find direct writing faster.

## **Research Question #5: Comparison of Strategies Reportedly Used by Spanish-English and English-Spanish Bilinguals**

### **Direct Writing Mode: Comparative Strategy Frequencies**

For the purposes of in-depth analysis of Hispanic bilingual students of French, we will focus just on those eight who were more Spanish-dominant bilinguals and the eight who were more English-dominant (see also, Brooks-Carson & Cohen, forthcoming). Regarding strategy use for these bilingual students writing in the direct mode, both the Spanish-English (S-E) and the English-Spanish (E-S) groups had similar frequencies of use for most strategies (see Table 6). In terms of planning strategies, both groups reported engaging in more on-line planning; that is they reported planning as they wrote rather than planning in advance. The Bilingual S-E group reported “sometimes” to “often” (3.6) planning as they wrote and sometimes (3.3) planning in advance. The Bilingual E-S group reported using much more often the strategy of planning as they went along (E-S 4.1) and only “rarely” to “sometimes” planning in advance (E-S 2.6).

For the strategies relating to grammatical accuracy, the two groups tended to report similar frequencies: “sometimes” to “often” verifying correct negative forms (S-E 3.9 and E-S 4.4), checking for adjective agreement (S-E 3.8 and E-S 4.0), and verifying subject-verb agreement (S-E 3.4 and E-S 3.6). However, for the strategies concerning syntactic complexity, the two groups reported different uses: the Bilingual S-E group reported “rarely” connecting short sentences into longer, complex sentences (2.6) and “rarely” purposely using complex grammatical structures (2.4) although they “often” used connecting words purposely to link ideas (S-E 4.0). The Bilingual E-S group reported using these strategies more consistently, reporting always using them at “sometimes”: connecting short sentences into longer, complex sentences

(E-S 3.4) purposely using complex grammatical structures (E-S 3.0), and using connecting words purposely to link ideas (E-S 3.6). Both groups reported “sometimes” attempting to use a wide variety of vocabulary, though the Bilingual S-E group tended to do so more often (S-E 3.5 and E-S 2.9).

In terms of the strategy use for the language of thinking about the task, both groups reported thinking in languages other than French during the direct French writing task. In both cases, they reported thinking more often in English than in Spanish. Those in the Bilingual S-E group reported “rarely” thinking in English (2.6) or in Spanish (2.3), and those in the Bilingual E-S group reported “often” thinking in English (4.0) but “rarely” thinking in Spanish (2.6).

### **Translated Writing Mode: Strategy Frequencies**

For those strategies relating to grammatical and syntactic accuracy that applied to both writing modes, students in the Bilingual S-E group and the Bilingual E-S group tended to report different frequencies. The Bilingual E-S group reported using the following three strategies more often than did the Bilingual S-E group: using complex grammatical forms (E-S 2.6, S-E 2.1), using adjective agreement (E-S 3.8, S-E 3.0), and checking negative forms (E-S 3.8, S-E 3.4). The two groups had the same frequencies for checking subject-verb agreement (E-S 3.4, S-E 3.4) and for using connecting words (E-S 3.9, S-E 3.9). See Table 6 for the frequencies reports.

Both groups reported “sometimes” attempting to use a wide variety of vocabulary (E-S 2.8, S-E 3.0). For the strategies that were specific to the translated mode, both groups reported using the strategies in similar ways: “often” making an effort to think about how to best express the ideas in French (S-E 4.3, E-S 3.9), “sometimes” avoiding word-for-word translation (S-E 3.3, E-S 3.5) and “sometimes” having difficulty finding translation equivalents (S-E 3.0, E-S 3.8). In

the planning strategies, both groups reported using the two strategies: changing the organization (S-E 3.6, E-S 3.5) and keeping the original organization from the L1 essay (S-E 3.4) about as often. Interestingly, however, the Bilingual S-E group reported “often” to “always” using the original organization in the translated French essay (E-S 4.4).

### **Research Question #6: Comparison of Two Groups of Bilinguals on Rated Performance in the Two Writing Modes and on Language Background Variables**

#### **Performance on the Written Tasks**

The raters provided scores on the three essays from each student. The scores for each essay within a category (direct French, translated French, and L1) were summed, and the means and standard deviations were calculated. These results are shown in Table 2. Consistent with earlier findings, both the Bilingual S-E and Bilingual E-S groups were rated higher on the direct French writing (S-E 37.50 and E-S 38.06) than on the translated French essays (S-E 34.88 and E-S 31.94). It may be surprising that the Bilingual E-S group was rated higher than the Bilingual S-E group on the direct French writing, in spite of the presumed advantage of the Spanish-dominant bilinguals, given the relative closeness between Spanish and French. However, this advantage did bear itself out in the scores for the translated French writing, where the Bilingual S-E group was rated higher than the Bilingual E-S group. While it may be interesting to note that for the L1 essays, the Bilingual E-S (writing in English) were rated higher on their L1 essays (E-S 34.69) than were the Bilingual S-E group (writing in Spanish) on their L1 essays (S-E 31.50), it is important to remember that the two L1 groups had different raters reading the essays. Given the issues raised by the raters themselves about possible differences in rating across languages, the meaningful comparisons must be limited to those between the direct French essays and the

direct translated essays. To recap, the Bilingual E-S group was rated higher on their direct French essays than on their translated French writing. The Bilingual S-E group was also rated higher on their direct French essays than on their translated French writing.

By way of reminder, the rating scales that were used for the three essays had four criteria in common: *variety in vocabulary, sense of the language, organizational structure, and clarity of points* (see Table 3 for the reports by criterion). *Freedom from translation effect* was a category for the direct French writing and for the L1 writings but not for the translated writing. *Smoothness of connectors* appeared as a criterion for translated writing and for L1 essays. In comparisons of the scores for the direct French writing, the Bilingual E-S group was rated higher than the Bilingual S-E group in most categories (*freedom* E-S 3.2 > S-E 2.9; *vocabulary* E-S 3.9 > S-E 3.6; *sense of the language* E-S 3.1 > 2.9; *organization* E-S 3.6 = S-E 3.6; *clarity* E-S 4.0 > S-E 3.9). In comparisons of the scores for the translated writing, the results were more mixed. The Bilingual S-E group was rated higher in *vocabulary* (S-E 3.6 > E-S 3.3), *sense of the language* (S-E 2.8 > E-S 2.0) and *smoothness of connectors* (S-E 2.8 > E-S 2.2). The Bilingual E-S group was rated higher in *organization* (E-S 3.1 > S-E 2.8) and in *clarity* (E-S 3.4 > S-E 3.1).

### **Language Background**

Students in the Bilingual S-E group all rated themselves as “excellent” or near “excellent” in their abilities to use Spanish to complete certain more informal tasks, such as writing an informal letter to a friend (4.9), speaking informally with friends (5.0), and listening to a movie with fast-moving and sometimes technical vocabulary (5.0).

Predictably, they indicated that they used Spanish “all or most of the time” in completing

tasks in more informal settings such as speaking at home (4.9), speaking with members of their extended families (5.0), and “often” speaking with friends (4.4). For formal or academic tasks, they felt less confident than when completing informal tasks; however, they still rated themselves between “very good” and “excellent” in their abilities in Spanish to write a term paper (4.6) and to give an academic talk (4.5). Understandably, they reported using Spanish only sometimes for the following tasks: when talking at the university (3.5), when speaking to neighbors (3.8: only two students reported “never” or “rarely”), and “rarely” when speaking with teachers (1.1).

The Bilingual E-S group reported slightly lower proficiency levels and frequencies, but the patterns were largely the same. They too reported feeling most confident using Spanish to write an informal letter to a friend (3.9), to speak informally with friends (4.5), and to listen to a movie with fast-moving and sometimes technical vocabulary (4.6). They also reported using Spanish most often: to speak at home (4.6), to speak with members of their extended families (4.9), and sometimes to speak with friends (3.5). Again, they were less confident using Spanish to complete academic tasks: to write a term paper (3.3), or to give an academic talk (3.5). Following the same pattern, they also reported using Spanish least often to speak with teachers (1.1) and rarely to “sometimes” to talk at the university (2.6) and “sometimes” to talk with neighbors (3.4).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study represented an effort to experiment with an alternative approach to short essay writing on language assessment tasks. The results showed that two-thirds of the students did better on the direct writing task across all rating scales; one-third on the translated writing task,

and one student did the same on both. When considering the various multitrait scales, it was found that grammar ratings were not significantly different across modes. It would appear that the kinds of choices made in selecting prepositions and partitive articles in French, in determining adjective-noun agreement, and in processing verb inflections were not so influenced by the mode. Since these decisions are tied so directly to the production of French text, then the same considerations would need to be made whether the text were written directly in French or in the L1 first and then translated. This would explain the lack of significant difference. Regardless of how well organized the essay was, how rich the vocabulary range, or how rich in ideas it was, the writer would still have to focus on the same grammatical needs in producing the French text.

Interestingly, the students reported thinking through English much of the time that they were supposedly engaged in the direct French writing task. This report suggests that, while for the translated writing task they were engaged in *written translation* on paper, they were nonetheless engaged in *mental translation* during the direct writing task. The point is that the two tasks, then, were not necessarily distinct in nature, but rather overlapping. The extent to which these two forms of translation overlap is an interesting research question and one that was simply identified and not probed in this study.

As noted at the outset of this paper, studies by both Brooks (1996) with English-speaking writers of French and Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) with Japanese writers of EFL had found distinct advantages for the translated writing mode. In the Brooks study, the students had been asked to prepare the two essays out of class, first in draft form and then in revised form, using software for French word-processing. So they had spent a considerable amount of time preparing

the essays in both the direct and translated writing modes. In the Kobayashi and Rinnert study, the students were given an hour of class time to write each of two essays on two successive days, one in Japanese L1 and then one in the FL, English. Then, on a third day they were given another hour to translate one of the essays into English. This procedure gave them ample time to assure that their translated essays were of the highest quality they could produce. The current study was intended to simulate typical writing situations that students face when they participate in classroom assessment. Perhaps it is a better measure of the impact of a given writing mode since it is possible that in the other two studies, the extra time factor could have neutralized differences or perhaps even given the advantage to one of the modes, such as to translate writing, which is not the most effective choice for some or many learners when under time pressure.

Because giving only one mode of response on an assessment instrument may bias against students, the findings from this study would underscore the value of multiple measures in assessment, something that experts in the field of language assessment have been asserting for some time. Furthermore, this study would suggest that what is ostensibly one task, namely writing a short essay in the TL, can be enhanced by allowing for alternate means of “warm up” or task preparation, such as through an initial writing of the essay in the L1 or the dominant language of instruction at the institution.

Collecting strategy use data along with performance ratings can help investigators obtain reasons for observed outcomes. For example, these data show that those who reported that they did not simplify their French in order to produce the French essay in the translation mode tended to receive higher overall ratings in written performance on the task. In other words, simplification was detrimental to rated performance because the French raters were trained to

give a higher rating for the use of subordination and relative pronouns, and simplification usually meant the reduction or elimination of subordinate clauses.

The finding that sometimes the students had difficulty writing directly in French and sometimes in using the translation mode reflects, in part, differences across the students, since it is likely that they encountered difficulties when they were asked to work in a non-preferred mode. Partly it could indicate that the tasks were at a comparable level of difficulty and that both were demanding in their own ways.

As stated at the outset, a purpose for including Spanish-English bilinguals in the study was to determine if they had different learning experiences with French given the proximity between these two Romance languages, the numerous true cognates and translation equivalents, and other ways in which the languages parallel each other. Consequently, it was thought that the Spanish-English bilinguals would have certain advantages and that their strategy patterns would be different from those of the English speakers. For this reason, it was surprising to the current investigators to find that the Spanish-English bilinguals in the study reported thinking in Spanish less often than they thought in English while writing the French essay in the supposedly direct mode. It is true that two of them actually used English as their L1 for the translation mode-writing task, but the other eight reported here used Spanish. The predominance of reported thinking or mental translation into English during French writing may be an immediate consequence of the fact that their American French textbooks use English, not Spanish, as the “explaining” language. In addition, these students needed to function in an English-language university within a bilingual community. It would also indicate a measure of their bilingual

dominance, with the scale weighted towards English dominance, but no language measure was administered to determine the actual language dominance configuration of the bilinguals.

Several findings underscored this reality of Hispanic bilinguals in an English-language institution. The Spanish-English bilinguals reported that they “often” or “always” avoided word-for-word translation from Spanish in the translated writing mode. Half of them also reported “often” or “always” having difficulty finding translation equivalents. Perhaps these students were actually avoiding thinking in Spanish to some extent, or if not doing it consciously, at least feeling the effects of being lost in translation or in a language limbo. In any event, their reported strategy behavior was quite similar to that of the English speakers.

The comparison of the Spanish-English and the English-Spanish bilinguals allowed for exploration of what it means to be bilingual in a monolingual university, studying a third language. Both bilingual groups in this study were rated higher on the direct French essays than on the translated French essays. Such a finding may invite speculation that the bilingual students were able to perform better in the direct writing mode because of the relative proximity between the Spanish and French languages. While this conclusion may at first seem plausible, it does not account for the success on the same task of two-thirds of the participants in the overall study (where 25 of the 39 were native speakers of English). Furthermore, it is not supported by the finding that the bilingual students who were dominant in English (rather than in Spanish) were rated the highest on the direct writing. Instead, an explanation for the success of all students on the direct writing task may be better linked to the nature of the writing task itself and to the fact that students had an extended period of writing time to complete the direct writing essay while

the time for the translated task was divided into two distinct parts: writing in the L1 and then translating.

The advantage of the E-S over the S-E bilinguals on direct writing may be surprising given the presumed advantage of Spanish speakers over English speakers for working in another Romance language. But the assumption **did** seem to hold true in terms of the translated French writing. A closer look at the scores by category confirms the presumed advantage, which may be attributable to the connections between Spanish and French for the purposes of translating. In fact those who were dominant in Spanish were rated higher in the categories of *variety of vocabulary*, *sense of the language*, and *smoothness of connectors*. The English dominant bilinguals were rated higher in the areas of *organization* and *clarity*, which recalls findings from earlier studies' findings about the benefits of using the L1. Studies mentioned in the Review of Literature described benefits in planning, idea generation, and coherence from allowing L1 use during the L2 writing process, benefits that may be present here as well.

It is also interesting to note the finding that the English-Spanish bilinguals were rated higher on their L1 essays than were the Spanish-English bilinguals on their L1 writing. It is important to remember that the bilinguals were identified as dominant in one language over the other based on their responses to the Language Background Questionnaires whereas regardless of the L1 reported, students were free to choose the language in which they would write the L1 essay. It was possible, and it was the case, then that a student could report Spanish as the L1 but then choose to write the L1 essay in English. It may be that the categorizations, as the students identified themselves, are not good measures of the students' actual bilingualism or of their relative experience with academic writing in the two languages. However, it should also be noted

that the raters for the Spanish and for English essays were different people. Therefore, it is possible that the raters, while reliable within groups and across languages in general, may have rated the L1 essays differently. The lower ratings on the L1 essays may be explained by higher expectations for essays by the raters given that students were to be writing in the L1, or by possible differences in the styles between the English and Spanish raters.

A third explanation may be the fact that the students knew that they would translate the L1 essay into French (that it was essentially a rough draft) and that it was the French essay that received the most attention. Moreover, the Spanish Raters reported to the researchers that some of the Spanish-English bilinguals showed examples of English interference in their Spanish writing. For this reason, the category of *freedom from translation* was retained in the L1 essay rating scale. However, without some verbal report about what the students were planning and doing, it is not possible to know why the L1 essays were rated lower than most of the TL essays.

Part of the explanation of the performance ratings may come from differences between the two groups of bilinguals in terms of their experience with the type of writing task given. It is possible that the English-Spanish bilinguals had had more experience writing personal opinion essays in English than the Spanish-English group. On the Follow-Up Background Questionnaire, seven of the Bilingual E-S students reported having most if not all of their formal schooling in English (the other did not reply). Five of the eight Bilingual S-E students reported having undergone their formal schooling in Spanish, two did not reply, and one described her experience in a bilingual school in the Dominican Republic where the language of instruction was Spanish until the fourth grade and then English from that point on. More information about the specifics of their formal schooling would have been perhaps helpful in understanding if this potential

difference could account for the performance ratings. In any case, this background information serves to reinforce the fact that the division between the two groups was not absolute; instead the crossover nature of the two bilingual groups' backgrounds reflects the complexity of the bilingual experience.

As for the language of thought while writing the essays, the English-Spanish group reported more often thinking in English than in Spanish while writing in French, and under the checklist for L1 writing, they reported "rarely" to "never" thinking in French while writing in the L1. This finding suggests that the English-Spanish bilinguals seemed to be much more comfortable thinking through these types of writing tasks in English, regardless of the bilingual component of their linguistic background. Moreover, their reported use of thinking strategies points to some differences from the Bilingual S-E group whose report of "rarely" thinking in English or Spanish when writing in the direct mode differed from the findings for the overall sample where, at the intermediate-level, most students engaged in some thinking in their L1 or in this case, in the dominant language of the academic environment (here, English).

In the translated writing mode, both subgroups tended to report using strategies of grammatical/syntactic accuracy in similar ways. For the strategies specific to the translated mode, the Spanish-English bilinguals reported using about equally often the strategies for keeping and changing the original organization of the essay. This finding may suggest a flexibility in style and/or a perceived difference between the appropriateness of the organization for the TL essay. The English-Spanish group reported more often sticking with the original organization in the translated French essay and less often changing the organization. Again, this pattern reflected that of the rest of the sample who also reported keeping more often than not the

original organization of the essay. While this finding is consistent with that of earlier studies suggesting that the L1 can bring a more coherent organization to the TL essay, it is not clear to what extent this continued use of L1 organization is a result of the time pressure several students reported feeling. Because they had completed an in-class, timed task, not rethinking the organization of an essay to be translated may have been a successful strategy for producing a target language essay within the study's constraints.

As for the strategies relating to actual translation, those in the Bilingual S-E group reported only "sometimes" avoiding word-for-word translation and "sometimes" having difficulty finding translation equivalents while those in the Bilingual E-S group reported slightly higher frequencies in trying to avoid it and in having difficulty finding equivalents. It may be that the variation lies in their different Spanish proficiency levels—that the Bilingual S-E group, having a firmer knowledge of Spanish, had a stronger sense of real and false cognates and translation possibilities between the languages. But without data on why individuals chose their strategies, it is impossible to explain the differences here. In order to elucidate this finding, further research needs to be conducted using verbal report during the writing sessions.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

The major limitation of the study was the sample size. It was originally intended that there be more robust groups of students, especially more Hispanic participants. The actual numbers made it necessary to consider some of the findings as suggestive rather than definitive. Secondly, the writing samples themselves were rather short due to the limited amount of time available for writing in class. While an in-class writing task does reflect in-class essays, the samples themselves may not have been long enough to bring out some potential differences that

emerged, for example, in the Brooks (1996) study when writers did their essays as homework. Particularly given the finding that the students tended to think through English when supposedly writing directly into French, the two tasks may not have been so different in practice, again possibly due to the limited amount of time available to the students for writing in class.

It would have been ideal to have raters that were balanced bilinguals in French, Spanish, and English in order to make rigorous comparisons of essay results across languages. While efforts were made to calibrate the ratings of the pairs of raters for each language, no efforts were made to calibrate across languages. So for this study, the question remains how exactly the various scales were defined and utilized by the English and Spanish raters in comparison to the French raters. The gathering of feedback from the raters during the rating process did help to address this issue but by no means resolved it.

No effort was made to assess the learning style preferences of the students participating in this study. Such data may have helped to interpret the results for the direct and the translated writing modes. For example, it may be that in this sample of nonnative writers in French, those with a more concrete, sequential, analytic, and closure-oriented learning style did better in the translation mode than those who with a more abstract (intuitive), non-sequential, synthetic, and open style.

It needs to be noted that subjects were responding to a pre-established set of strategies. The open-ended questions dealt with likes and dislikes, not with specific processes. So while the strategies checklists were based both on strategies described in previous empirical findings in the research literature and on results from pilot data in this study, there was no open-ended probe of strategies in this study, and it is possible that such a probe would have furnished insights into

other noteworthy strategies that students use in these two modes of writing.

In terms of the students' use of the L1, there was no mechanism in this study for discovering what students meant when they reported *thinking in the L1*. This label was intended to mean two things: both thinking about the content and the organization of the ideas as well as using the L1 to think through the arguments for making their case. Hence, "thinking in the L1" could refer to a complex mix of ideas about content, about the organization of ideas, about the selection of language material, and about the conversion of that material into French.

Finally, no effort was made to deal with rhetorical issues in this study with students composing for 20 minutes or less. Given the rich literature on contrastive rhetoric to refer to, this avenue for research may be fruitful for future investigation, especially when essays are written out of class without time constraints. Then it could be insightful to see whether, for example, rhetorical patterns would be more native-like when the text has been written directly in the TL as opposed to when it is translated from an L1/dominant language version.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

In terms of future research, one project might be to plan an interventionist study with larger numbers of learners and more options. The study could vary the amount of writing time allowed. Different groups could get training in different sets of strategies -- some sets favoring a direct approach to writing and some favoring the translated mode. The training would be informed by the insights gained in this current study regarding students' strategy use preferences. Students could, for example, be assessed for their learning style and writing strategy preferences before performing the writing tasks. An immediate type of follow up using data from this study would be to look closely at the fourteen students who did not do better in the direct mode, even

returning to their actual essays to see if any other patterns emerge that might characterize their behavior.

At the same time that it would pay to enlarge the study, it can also be beneficial to do more small-scale and case-study work to better understand the issues at play in the current study. For example, it may be beneficial to explore further the issue of whether bilinguals resist thinking in their L1 if their studies at a university are through another language, even if the university is located in a bilingual community. This situation could be compared to that of a university where instruction is bilingual. Other work has established that the language of instruction at the university level can have a decided impact on the language of thought of the students. A study by Cohen and Allison (1998; in press), for example, found by means of retrospective verbal report that Spanish, French, and German university-level immersion students engaged in less mental translation and more cognitive processing directly through the immersion language than did non-immersion program students who were also studying in the immersion classes.

Likewise, verbal report data could be collected from subjects while they are planning and writing their essays to identify and describe factors contributing to their relative success in one writing mode in contrast to another. In this study, for example, it would have been instructive to get insights as to why thirteen of the students did better in the translation mode than in the direct writing mode. Correlating the features in a given mode of the writing and the students' reported strategy use may provide some understanding of how translation as a writing strategy might benefit certain students.

Finally, it could be insightful to investigate the results of direct vs. translated writing

modes across a wider range of languages, including, say, Chinese and Arabic. The study would consider the larger sociocultural context of writing, since how translation is viewed by teachers and by students in different educational cultures may vary.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

This study has called attention to the various ways that students may use their L1 or dominant language when preparing and writing a TL essay. First, student writers may think about the topic in the L1, as the literature review indicated. Secondly, the writers may engage in mental translation, where the translation is in their minds and not on paper. Thirdly, they may actually write out an L1/dominant language version and then translate it into the TL. Earlier research (Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Friedlander, 1990; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1992) had suggested that the L1 or dominant language may be best used to plan and organize the writing while the TL is best for writing on the sentential level. Results from this study would support the notion that thinking through the L1 or dominant language may be a benefit for some students in certain writing tasks, and therefore the study seems to lend some support to the value of generating training or coaching materials dealing with translation strategies.

For example, the materials could provide suggestions for how the systematic use of translation might serve effectively as a means for organizing ideas and for expressing them in a concise, lexically acceptable, and grammatically appropriate manner. Given the significant relationship between ratings for *variety in vocabulary* and for both *ease in direct writing* and *ease in translating*, it would seem that particularly at an intermediate level, training could focus on how students go about selecting appropriate vocabulary for a given writing context and the role that mental and written translation might play in the selection process.

Needless to say, training materials would need to include a series of caveats, indicating that translation strategies may have a differential effect, depending on the nature of the task (e.g., an in-class essay with/without time pressure, an in-class essay exam, or an essay as homework), the topic, the learning style preferences of the writer, and so forth.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A

### Participant Questionnaire

1. Student Research Number: \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Gender: M \_\_\_ F \_\_\_
4. Number of semesters of university study completed: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Indicate the language that you consider to be your native language: \_\_\_\_\_
6. In the languages that you know, please rate your ability to write a term paper for a course:  
*1= poor 2=fair 3= good 4=very good 5= excellent*  
English \_\_\_\_\_ Spanish (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_ French \_\_\_\_\_ Other languages \_\_\_\_\_
7. In the languages that you know, please rate your ability to speak informally with friends:  
*1= poor 2=fair 3= good 4=very good 5= excellent*  
English \_\_\_\_\_ Spanish (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_ French \_\_\_\_\_ Other languages \_\_\_\_\_
8. In the languages that you know, please rate your ability to give a talk on an academic topic:  
*1= poor 2=fair 3= good 4=very good 5= excellent*  
English \_\_\_\_\_ Spanish (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_ French \_\_\_\_\_ Other languages \_\_\_\_\_
9. In the languages that you know, please rate your ability to understand a movie with fast-moving and sometimes technical vocabulary:  
*1= poor 2=fair 3= good 4=very good 5= excellent*  
English \_\_\_\_\_ Spanish (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_ French \_\_\_\_\_ Other languages \_\_\_\_\_
10. If you are willing, please indicate the letter grade you received in English composition:  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Please indicate any grades you have received in past French courses: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Writing Strategies Checklist: French Direct Writing

Please rate your responses to the following questions on a scale of 1-5, and please note any questions or comments you have about the questions or about how you interpret the question alongside of the item itself.

**As you prepared and then wrote the essay directly in French, to what extent did you:**

*5 = always 4 = often 3 = sometimes 2 = rarely 1 = never*

- \_\_\_\_\_ plan out the organization of the essay in advance
- \_\_\_\_\_ plan out the organization of the essay as you went along
- \_\_\_\_\_ pay attention to the connecting words between ideas
- \_\_\_\_\_ attempt to use a wide variety of vocabulary
- \_\_\_\_\_ find yourself thinking in English and translating
- \_\_\_\_\_ find yourself thinking in your dominate language (if not English) and translating
- \_\_\_\_\_ purposely make use of complex grammatical structures
- \_\_\_\_\_ purposely connect shorter sentences into longer, complex sentences
- \_\_\_\_\_ check for subject-verb agreement in the essay
- \_\_\_\_\_ make sure that the negative forms were used properly
- \_\_\_\_\_ check for adjective agreement in gender and number

**Writing Strategies Checklist: L1 Writing**

Please rate your responses to the following questions on a scale of 1-5, and please note any questions and/or comments you have about the questions or about how you interpret the question.

**As you prepared and then wrote the version of the essay in your dominant language, to what extent did you:**

*5 = always 4 = often 3 = sometimes 2 = rarely 1 = never*

- \_\_\_\_\_ plan out the organization of the essay in advance
- \_\_\_\_\_ plan out the organization of the essay as you went along
- \_\_\_\_\_ pay attention to the connecting words you chose to link ideas together
- \_\_\_\_\_ attempt to use a wide variety of vocabulary
- \_\_\_\_\_ find yourself thinking in French
- \_\_\_\_\_ find yourself thinking in another language (which? \_\_\_\_\_)
- \_\_\_\_\_ purposely make use of complex grammatical structures
- \_\_\_\_\_ purposely connect shorter sentences into longer, complex sentences
- \_\_\_\_\_ check for subject-verb agreement in the essay
- \_\_\_\_\_ make sure that the negative forms were used properly
- \_\_\_\_\_ check for adjective agreement in gender and number

**Writing Strategies Checklist: Translated Writing**

Please rate your responses to the following questions on a scale of 1-5, and please note any questions and/or comments you have about the questions or about how you interpret the question.

**When you translated the essay from your dominant language to French, to what extent did you:**

*5 = always 4 = often 3 = sometimes 2 = rarely 1 = never*

- \_\_\_\_\_ stick to the organization used in the first essay
- \_\_\_\_\_ change the organization somewhat to fit the French language
- \_\_\_\_\_ attempt to find the best connecting words used to link ideas together
- \_\_\_\_\_ make an effort to think how best to express the ideas in French
- \_\_\_\_\_ avoid translating word-for-word
- \_\_\_\_\_ have difficulty finding translation equivalents in French for words in your essay
- \_\_\_\_\_ find yourself using simpler words and structures in French
- \_\_\_\_\_ attempt to use a wide variety of vocabulary
- \_\_\_\_\_ purposely make use of complex grammatical structures
- \_\_\_\_\_ check for subject-verb agreement in the essay
- \_\_\_\_\_ make sure that the negative forms were used properly
- \_\_\_\_\_ check for adjective agreement in gender and number

**Writing Strategies Checklist: Comments Sheet**

**Please compare your experience of writing in your dominant language and then translating the essay to French vs. writing directly in French:**

1. What aspects did you **like** about writing in your dominant language first and then translating?

What advantages do you see to this approach to producing a well-written essay in French?

2. What aspects did you **not** like?

3. What aspects did you **like** about writing directly in French? What do you see as the advantages of attempting to write directly in French?

4. Do you enjoy writing the kinds of essays you wrote for the study?

Thank you so much for your participation in this study. Do you have any other points you would like to make about the writing tasks we gave you? (You may write on the back if you need to.)

## Appendix C

### Follow-Up Strategy Checklist

Based on your responses to the Comments questionnaire, we have put together a summary list of the possible responses. Please rate your responses to the following questions on a scale of 1-5, and please note any questions and/or comments you have about the questions or about how you interpret the question.

**When you translated the essay from your dominant language to French, to what extent did you:**

*5 = always    4 = often    3 = sometimes    2 = rarely    1 = never*

\_\_\_\_\_ bring BETTER organization to the FRENCH ESSAY than IF you had written it directly in French.

\_\_\_\_\_ change the organization of the dominant language essay somewhat to fit the French language.

\_\_\_\_\_ think through your ideas more clearly in the dominant language essay than in the French essay written directly in French.

\_\_\_\_\_ find it easier to write in the dominant language than in the essay directly written French.

\_\_\_\_\_ have a greater number of ideas for the dominant language essay than for the French essay.

\_\_\_\_\_ have a better vocabulary in the dominant language essay than you did for the French essay.

\_\_\_\_\_ feel that you had time pressures to complete the translation into French.

\_\_\_\_\_ find it difficult to translate into the FL.

\_\_\_\_\_ dislike being required to use translation as a strategy.

\_\_\_\_\_ purposely simplify your dominant language text in order to translate it into French.

\_\_\_\_\_ find it easier to write directly in French than to translate.

\_\_\_\_\_ find it difficult to write directly in French.

\_\_\_\_\_ feel that thinking in French during the whole process is better than translating.

**I feel that writing directly IN French:**

*5 = always 4 = often 3 = sometimes 2 = rarely 1 = never*

\_\_\_\_\_ is faster than translating.

\_\_\_\_\_ helps to focus on French expression.

\_\_\_\_\_ helps you to learn the language.

## Appendix D

### Rating Scales for French Essays

#### A. *EXPRESSION*:

<u>freedom from translation effect</u>	<u>variety in vocabulary</u>	<u>sense of the language</u>
5. There is no negative transfer from the dominant language	Vocabulary variety is excellent	Excellent control over native-like expression
4. There is only slight negative transfer	Vocabulary variety is good	Good control over native-like expression
3. There is moderate negative transfer	Vocabulary variety is fair	There is fair control over native-like expression
2. There is extensive negative transfer	Vocabulary variety is weak	There is weak control over native-like expression
1. There is very extensive negative transfer	Vocabulary variety is poor	There is little or no control over native-like expression

**B. TRANSITIONS****organizational structure****clarity of points****smoothness of connectors**

5. Excellent organizational structure	Excellent statement of points	Excellent connections across points
4. Good organizational structure	Good statement of points	Good connections across points
3. Acceptable organizational structure	Fair statement of points	Fair use of connectors
2. Weak organizational structure	Weak statement of points	Weak use of connectors
1. Poor organizational structure	Poor statement of points	Poor use of connectors

**C. CLAUSES****use of subordination****use of relative pronouns**

5. Excellent control over subordination	Excellent use of relative pronouns
4. Good control over subordination	Good use of relative pronouns
3. Fair control over subordination	Fair use of relative pronouns
2. Weak ability to subordinate	Weak facility with relative pronouns
1. Poor control over subordination	Poor control over relative pronouns

**D. GRAMMAR**

**Prepositions/  
Partitive Articles**

**Noun/  
Adjective Agreement**

**Verbs**

5. Excellent control

Excellent control

Excellent control

4. Good control

Good control

Good control

3. Fair control

Fair control

Fair control

2. Weak control

Weak control

Weak control

1. Poor control

Poor control

Poor control