

## The relationship between writing instruction and EFL students' revision processes

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*ABSTRACT: In this paper I discuss the four major approaches to writing instruction in the contexts of second and foreign language teaching. First, I present an overview of each approach to writing instruction. Second, I analyze the concept of error adopted by the different approaches and how these concepts affect the role assigned to revision by each approach. Next, I discuss some definitions of revision present in the literature, the prevailing model of the revision process, and the types of revisions performed by experienced and inexperienced writers. Finally, I briefly discuss the way revision has been dealt with in the classroom context.*

*RESUMO: O escopo do presente trabalho é a discussão sobre as quatro principais abordagens do ensino de escrita nos contextos de ensino de segunda língua e língua estrangeira. Primeiramente, apresento uma visão geral de cada abordagem para o ensino da escrita. Em seguida, analiso o conceito de erro adotado por cada abordagem e como esses conceitos afetam o papel designado à revisão por cada abordagem. Posteriormente, discuto alguns conceitos de revisão presentes na literatura, o modelo do processo de revisão mais corrente, e os tipos de revisão feitas por escritores experientes e inexperientes. Finalmente, discuto a forma como a revisão tem sido trabalhada no contexto de sala de aula.*

**KEYWORDS:** *writing, revision, instruction*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *escrita, revisão, ensino*

# WRITING INSTRUCTION AND REVISION PROCESSES

## APPROACHES TO WRITING INSTRUCTION

Writing instruction has undergone several changes throughout the years, in the context of both  $L_1$  and  $L_2$ /FL teaching. As Silva (1990) points out, we can identify at least four central approaches, or orientations to  $L_2$  instruction in writing: (1) Controlled Composition; (2) Current-Traditional Rhetoric; (3) the Process Approach, and (4) English for Specific Purposes. All the approaches address the writer, the reader, the text, and the context. What makes the approaches different from one another is the way they regard each of these four basic elements in  $L_2$  writing instruction.

The Controlled Composition approach sees writing as a secondary activity; as a means of practicing structures and vocabulary learned in the classroom. Therefore, the context for writing is the classroom and the audience is the teacher. This approach focuses on form and accuracy, and writing is simply a means of assessing students' ability to manipulate the structures practiced in the classroom.

In a similar vein, the Current-Traditional Rhetoric orientation places writing in the limited context of the classroom, and the teacher as the target audience. What differentiates this orientation from the previous one is the emphasis it places on text organization. As Silva (1990) observes, in the Current-Traditional Rhetoric, writing is "a matter of arrangement" (p. 13), and students have to learn how to identify and use prescribed patterns.

An attempt to reduce the emphasis on the formal aspect of writing and to enlarge the context and the audience of writing is known as the Process Approach. Different from Controlled Composition and Current-Traditional Rhetoric, this approach, which is theoretically supported by Flower and Hayes' (1981) model of composing, focuses on writers and the process they undergo while composing written texts. Furthermore, writing is thought to convey meaning and is a "complex, recursive, and creative process" (Silva, 1990, p. 15). Rather than simply focusing on accuracy, the process approach aims at developing students' composing process in a holistic fashion. This goal implies that students need to acquire experience in writing for several purposes, in various contexts, and addressing different audiences (Hairstone, 1982)

Similar to the Process Approach, the orientation of English for Specific Purposes (which includes the Task-Based Approach and

English for Academic Purposes) is concerned with the production of writing within a specific context and is directed to pre-defined readers. While the former approach aims at wider contexts and audiences, the latter is characterized by specific targets: e.g., the context may be the academic or the business world, and the audience may be the members of the academic community or business people. As English for Specific Purposes aims at enabling students to produce written texts that will be accepted by experts in their fields, courses based on this approach try to “recreate the conditions under which actual ... writing tasks are done” (Silva, 1990, p. 17), and have students practice genres and tasks commonly required in their jobs or educational environment. Therefore, English for Specific Purposes focuses exclusively on the production of writing within a specific context, and it is mainly concerned with the reader’s reaction towards the written text.

While contrasting these four approaches to the study of writing, Silva (1990) observes that none of them are sufficiently supported by empirical research, and that none of them can be considered as the appropriate approach to writing instruction. His criticism is based on the fact that all of the orientations fail to encompass all four basic elements that should be integrated into any approach to writing instruction — the writer, the audience, the text, and the context. As we have seen, each approach tends to emphasize a specific aspect, thus neglecting the interaction between the four elements in the L<sub>2</sub>/FL writing context.

Hillocks (1986), in turn, directs his criticism to the Process Approach, due to its exclusive focus on the writing process, and proposes a process/product combination as the best approach to writing instruction. Hillocks’, as well as Dyer’s (1996) criticism, addresses the focus on process and the lack of specification concerning task design and target audience proposed by the Process Approach. Both authors refute two of the principles of the process writing approach: (1) Writing ability is gained through mere practice, and (2) The writing process is a basic skill that generalizes to various contexts. Hillocks and Dyer believe that students need to be prepared for *specific* writing tasks that they will come across, and that “there are as many different writing processes as there are academic writing tasks” (Dyer, 1996, p. 313). The idea then, is to add to Process Writing the concept of task-based approach, which takes into account students’ specific needs and has

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them perform tasks that are similar to the types of texts they are actually required to write.

Similar to Silva (1990), Raimes (1991) places the approaches to writing instruction in L<sub>2</sub> into four groups. This author also concludes that the approaches proposed unto the present time contain some shortcomings. Nevertheless, she recognizes the value of the research carried out so far, especially the research based on the Process Approach and English for Specific Purposes, as a means of capturing the degree of complexity, power and diversity that is involved in the act of writing. As the author points out, the current approaches should work as a guideline to help teachers make decisions about how to teach writing, but such approaches should never be taken as the final word in writing instruction. Moreover, Raimes suggests that teachers become researchers by using classroom data. As researchers, teachers will learn to question the theories and not to accept any methodology presented as the ideal one. Concurring with Raimes, I believe that teachers are the ones who are in a better position to make decisions concerning the kind of methodology that is appropriate to the students they are teaching at a specific time. This last assertion is especially true in the context of L<sub>2</sub> instruction, for in this context, the audience tends to be quite heterogeneous.

In this section, I have briefly described the major approaches to L<sub>2</sub> writing instruction. I have adopted the position that a combination of the Process Approach and English for Specific Purposes, at present, seems to be the best orientation to writing instruction in the contexts of L<sub>2</sub>/FL instruction. I will now turn to the role of revision — a major component of the writing process — within each orientation.

### ERROR, REVISION AND THE APPROACHES TO WRITING INSTRUCTION

The discussion about the perspective of error in the context of second language acquisition is essential if we intend to understand the role of revision within the four approaches to writing instruction. The concepts of writing and error underlying the four approaches previously discussed determine the role ascribed to revision within each approach.

In the Controlled Composition and Current-Traditional Rhetoric approaches, students are expected to reproduce sentences and rhetorical patterns, respectively, based on a model presented by the teacher. In these approaches, then, revising a text consists of proof-reading it and eliminating any element that prevents the text from matching the ‘perfect’ form presented by the model. That is, revision is focused on mechanics, grammar, or organization of texts, while content is generally disregarded. Furthermore, if students fail to eliminate the problems in these three areas, they are thought to have learning problems (Bartholomae, 1988). Thus, we can say that the traditional orientations to writing (Controlled Composition and Current Traditional Rhetoric) regard errors — a key concept in revision — as imperfections and signs of learners’ failure to acquire the standard version of the written language. In addition, errors tend to be viewed in isolation, or as an undesirable aspect of students’ compositions, which will only be analyzed by teachers when the compositions are considered to be final products.

This notion of error seems to reflect the view proposed by the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1993), according to which error is a consequence of transfer of aspects of the  $L_1$ . Therefore, this hypothesis sets out to describe languages and identify points of similarities and differences between them, predicting that the areas where  $L_1$  and  $L_2$  differ are natural sources of learners’ errors in  $L_2$ . In order to prevent students from making mistakes, teachers should have students imitate and memorize “perfect” models, hoping that through repetition students can avoid thinking in  $L_1$  and, consequently, avoid transferring “wrong” structures to the target language. This is the basic reasoning behind the Audiolingual Method that was fashionable during the 60’s and 70’s in the context of second language teaching.

There are two types of criticism to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. First, as Lightbown and Spada (1993) point out, this hypothesis fails to account for errors in  $L_2$  that cannot be explained by  $L_1$  interference, and predicts errors that do not actually occur in  $L_2$ . Second, by viewing errors simply as a result of  $L_1$  interference, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis places the environment as the predominant factor in SLA, while learners are believed to play only a

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passive role in accepting the impositions of the environment (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1993).

The nativist theory of language acquisition developed by Chomsky (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1993) gave rise to two different perspectives in the context of SLA—the perspective of Error Analysis, and the perspective of Interlanguage. Both perspectives regard errors as “an inevitable part of learning” (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982, p. 138). According to these perspectives, the analysis of errors is a valuable tool that provides us with data that can help us to understand the L<sub>2</sub> acquisition process and improve instruction.

The Error Analysis perspective provides an important step in recognizing the validity of the study of error as a means of trying to understand learners’ acquisition process. However, researchers following this perspective have concentrated on developing taxonomies of errors, which involve various categories with no set boundaries (e.g. *error types based on linguistic category*; *surface strategy taxonomy*; *communicative effect taxonomy* (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982, p. 146). Bartholomae<sup>1</sup> (1988) also sees problems with the Error Analysis perspective. He points out two other major shortcomings: (1) It was designed to assess *spoken performance*, consequently, it is not appropriate to assess written language due to the differences between these two modalities of language communication (i.e., speech and writing) concerning conventions, source of learning, process of acquisition, formality and so forth, and (2) It is difficult to classify the errors through mere textual analysis, which is not sufficient to deduce students’ intentions.

According to Interlanguage (Selinker, 1972) — the linguistic system developed by L<sub>2</sub> learners which contains elements of their L<sub>1</sub>, the L<sub>2</sub> being learned, and language systems in general — errors are viewed as resulting from strategies learners’ employ to learn the target language. The three components of learners’ interlanguage are likely to

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<sup>1</sup> Bartholomae (1988) proposes two techniques to overcome the weaknesses of the Error Analysis approach: teacher-student conferences and reading aloud. According to Bartholomae, these techniques would help teachers to elicit students’ intentions while writing, as well as distinguish “performance errors” from errors that are the result of stages of development or idiosyncrasies.

produce different kinds of errors (e.g., *interference*, *intralingual*, and *developmental* errors (Richards, 1971)), and these errors can reveal which stage of acquisition learners are in. Thus, different from the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, both Error Analysis and Interlanguage propose that learners play an active role in the acquisition of an L2, since they can decide the level of proficiency they want to achieve. To acquire the L2, they process input, they use this information to generate hypotheses, and then test and refine them (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1993).

The perspectives of Error Analysis and Interlanguage have influenced the conception of error adopted by the Process Approach to writing instruction, and this conception of error affects the role assigned to revision by this approach. In fact, the role of revision in writing is emphasized by the Process Approach, since revision is regarded as a basic and recursive component of the writing process. Thus, contrary to Controlled Composition and Current-Traditional Rhetoric, Process Writing followers propose that: (1) Writing is composed of several stages such as pre-writing, writing a first draft focusing on content, writing as many drafts as necessary to revise the organization of the ideational content, and receiving reader's feedback (Keh, 1990); and (2) Revision can occur several times and at different stages of writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes; Flower; Schriver; Stratman, & Carey, 1987).

Similar to Process Writing, English for Specific Purposes maintains that errors are a reflection of strategies used by students to learn the target language, and that revision is a recursive activity. Nevertheless, as English for Specific Purposes is mainly concerned with the audience, the revision process is guided by "specific criteria for evaluation" (Dyer, 1996, p. 314). That is, when students are asked to revise a text, they receive specific instructions to focus on certain aspects of the text (e.g., audience, grammar, style, or mechanics).

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## THE REVISION PROCESS

Revision<sup>2</sup> is regarded as an important step in the writing process (e.g. Hayes et al., 1987; Sommers, 1984; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1987). According to Sommers (1984), the revision process consists of various changes performed in a written text while it is being written and/or afterwards. Likewise, Hayes et al. (1987) claim that revision is a recursive process (it occurs at any point in the writing process), and that includes reading to comprehend plus reading to improve or change the original text.<sup>3</sup> Recent research has also regarded revision as a recursive activity. This view is different from previous studies whose ideas are reflected in traditional manuals of writing instruction, in which revision is regarded as “a separate activity, performed on completed drafts”. (Barlett, 1982, p. 345)

Witte (1985) proposes that revision be taken as a subprocess of reviewing, a more comprehensive component of the writing process. Thus, while reviewing the text, writers evaluate it, but they may revise it or not, depending on the level of incongruities they find between their writing plans and the actual written text. Witte observes, however, that revision is not restricted to the written text, but that it also takes place while the writer is planning, which he calls *pretextual* revision. In his view, research should take into account both types of revision: the one performed during the pre-text and the one performed on the text written down; nevertheless, he does not explain how this kind of research should be carried out. One possible way of investigating what goes on in the writers’ mind while they compose is the thinking-aloud protocol.

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<sup>2</sup> Hull (1986) makes a distinction between the terms revision and editing. For him, revision deals with the changes at the content level, while editing deals with changes at the formal level. In this thesis, the term revision refers to changes at both content and formal levels.

<sup>3</sup> These definitions of revision are also shared by authors such as Barlett (1982), and Bereiter & (Scardamalia, 1987).



THE ROLE OF REVISION IN THE WRITING PROCESS

According to Witte (1985), the segmented fashion in which writing has been presented by traditional approaches has greatly influenced teachers', researchers', and students' conception of revision. In these approaches, the act of writing is regarded as an activity consisting of "a linear sequence — that may be repeated — of discrete stages" (Witte, 1985, p. 255), and revision is regarded as a final step, performed only after the text has been written down.

A different perspective is signaled by researchers such as Sommers (1984) and Hayes et al. (1987), who recognize the recursiveness of revision. Giving support to this view is Flower and Hayes' (1981) model of the composing process, which presents revision as a recursive element that can be called upon at any time and at any stage of the writing process.

COGNITIVE PROCESSES OF REVISION: A MODEL

As we have seen, researchers differ in their concept of revision and the role revision plays in the writing process. In this section, I discuss a model that tries to explain the cognitive processes of revision, and which has been adopted by the vast majority of researchers dealing with revision.

The model was designed by Hayes et al. (1987), and was based on Flower and Hayes' (1981) model of the composing process. According to Hayes et al.'s model, there are three types of evaluation that may lead to revision: (1) The reviser evaluates the text against criteria of the standard language concerning aspects such as grammar, spelling, and clarity; (2) The reviser detects a contradiction between the writer's intended text and its realization; and (3) The reviser evaluates the writing plan by observing the appropriateness of general goals and audience.

Thus, contrary to other researchers, (e.g., Sommers, 1984; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1987), Hayes et al. believe that the perception of an incongruity between intention (*writer's plan*) and text is not the only initiating condition for revision. In their view, this comparison between intention and text only occurs in the second kind of evaluation

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described above. The third type of evaluation is the most complex and is regarded as the most effective for producing high quality revisions.

In their model Hayes et al. (1987) propose that the revision process is divided into two sections: the *processes* in which writers engage, and the types of *knowledge* that influence, or are a result of the composing process.

The processes in which writers engage are *task definition*, *evaluation*, *goal setting*, and *strategy selection*. The first process, task definition, specifies the reviser's *goals* (clarity, elegance, etc.), establishing whether the writer should examine *global features*, *local features* or both, and specifies the steps to be followed when revising a text. The task definition is subject to change during the revision process. The second process, *evaluation*, is the application of the *goals*, *features* and *constraints* identified in the task definition. It includes reading beyond comprehension, and can produce important discoveries to the revision process. *Problem representation* is a kind of knowledge that influences the evaluation, and it represents the ability to detect and diagnose problems in a text within a continuum. According to the authors, detecting and diagnosing are separate skills, i.e., revisers may be able to detect a problem in a written text, but they may not be able to diagnose and fix this problem. On the other hand, revisers may be able to detect and even fix a problem without knowing how to explain the source of the problem.

The last process (*strategy selection*) is linked to the different strategies or procedures adopted by the reviser. Thus, when revisers detect a problem they may act in five different ways: (1) *ignore* it; (2) acknowledge it but decide to postpone the change; (3) search "for more information to clarify the problem representation" (Hayes et al., 1987, p. 187); (4) rewrite, or (5) revise the text. While revising, the writer (or reviser) tries to fix the problems of the text, avoiding changes in the original text. On the other hand, the rewriting strategy consists of identifying the main idea, rewriting the text (or parts of it) and, consequently, changing the *surface structure* of the text without affecting meaning. The rewriting strategy is generally adopted in two situations: (1) when the reviser detects a problem, but does not know how to solve it, or (2) when the text is so problematic that the reviser thinks that rewriting is a more effective strategy.

Of great influence on the strategy adopted by the reviser, as well as on the quality of the revision, is the resource of information (“appropriate rules, maxims, and problem-solving procedures” (Hayes et al., 1987, p. 188) available to the reviser. Hayes et al. see this resource as a *means-ends table*. Means is defined as the solutions available to solve the problems (i.e., the *ends*) to be fixed, that may vary in each writer, being more complex in the experienced writer.

Taking into account the four processes that make up the act of revising, Hayes et al. conclude that experienced writers are able to identify many textual problems at the higher and lower levels. On the other hand, inexperienced writers tend to focus their revision on the lower level, and rarely detect problems at the higher level.

Hayes et al.’s model is comprehensive and tries to explain the revision process of all types of writers, independently of their degree of mastery of both writing and revising.

#### EXPERIENCED AND INEXPERIENCED WRITERS AND THEIR APPROACH TO REVISION

As Scardamalia and Bereiter (1987) observe, the empirical research on revision has concentrated on the investigation of differences between the revisions of experienced and inexperienced writers. The types of revision performed by writers are used as a criterion to classify them within these two categories.

One important aspect to be considered by researchers dealing with revision is how to analyze the changes writers perform on a written text when they set out to revise it. A common procedure mentioned in the literature is to establish a taxonomy of possible revisions, which is then used by the researcher as a guideline to classify and count the number of revisions actually performed.

Researchers such as Sommers (1984), Hall (1990), and Porte (1996) built their taxonomy of revision based on the “linguistic level (e.g., word, clause, sentence) or the operation (e.g., addition, deletion, substitution) entailed by the revision.” (Matsuhashi & Gordon, 1985, p. 227). Conversely, Faigley and Witte’s (in: Matsuhashi & Gordon, 1985) taxonomy take into account how revision affects the meaning of the text, thus coming up with two basic types of revision: (1) text-based

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revisions<sup>4</sup> (i.e., revisions that add or eliminate information), and (2) surface revisions<sup>5</sup> (i.e., revisions that paraphrase the text, or parts of it, without affecting the informational content).

Another way of classifying the types of revision is to develop a set of categories. Dellagnelo (1997), for example, developed a set of categories to be used by teachers while providing written feedback to student writers. The categories are made up of short sentences identifying the kind of problem present in the students' compositions. This device was designed after the author had analyzed a large number of compositions written by Brazilian EFL students, and identified the problems present in their texts. The final result of such an analysis was a list of forty five types of problems, which she divided into three main categories: (1) *content and ideas*, (2) *organization and form*, and (3) *writing conventions*. This classification of writing problems was based on Smalzer's (1996) list of errors.

### EXPERIENCED AND INEXPERIENCED WRITERS

As Hayes et al. (1987) propose, the revision process requires the reader to act in two different ways: (1) read to comprehend and (2) read to correct<sup>6</sup>. By reading to comprehend, the authors mean the reader's "attempts to construct a satisfactory internal representation of the meaning of the text" (p. 202). Reading to correct is the performance of the revision process, involving changes at all levels. Nevertheless, these two kinds of reading can occur simultaneously, as the analysis of some thinking aloud protocols indicates (Hayes et al., 1987).

The revision process forces the reader to adopt a different attitude towards the text, and this attitude is influenced by the revising situation. According to Hayes et al., three revising situations can be

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<sup>4</sup> In the literature, text-based revisions are also referred to as global or higher level revisions.

<sup>5</sup> In the literature, surface revisions are also referred to as local or lower level revisions.

<sup>6</sup> There are authors such as Hull (1986) who classify the act of reading to comprehend as *revision*, and reading to correct as *editing*.

identified: (1) revisers evaluating another writer's text; (2) revisers evaluating their own text, and (3) revisers evaluating writing plans<sup>7</sup>.

The first revising situation is the one commonly experienced by writing instructors and editors. In this case, the reviser has to infer the writer's intention and to construct a possible "representation of the meaning of the text" (Hayes et al, 1987). According to some authors (Sommers, 1984; Barlett, 1982; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Hayes et al. 1987, and others) the reviser who faces the first situation is more able to identify problems concerning global aspects of the text (inconsistencies, referential problems). However, Barlett (1982) shows some results of experiments indicating that this reviser also has problems identifying mechanical and syntactical errors.

The lack of awareness of mechanical and syntactical errors is also a problem for revisers working in the second situation (revisers evaluating their own texts). In addition, these revisers have problems with "achiev[ing] a detachment from their work that allows them to see what is on the page, not what they hope will be on the page"<sup>8</sup> (Murray, in: Barlett, 1982). In other words, the double role of reader and writer interferes with the reviser's performance.

Finally, the last revision situation consists of having the reviser evaluate his/her or someone else's writing plan in order to check its adequacy in relation to the intended meaning, goals, and audience. This situation requires mastery of the writing process, and is common only in the work of expert writers.

In fact, the revisers' performance while revising their own texts or a text written by someone else is one of the criteria used to identify them as experienced or inexperienced writers. Analyzing the performance includes checking both the amount of revision, and the aspect that is emphasized by the reviser (higher or lower level aspects of revision). As suggested by Barlett (1982), and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), inexperienced writers have special difficulties revising their own texts, for they evaluate the texts according to a

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<sup>7</sup> Hayes et al. (1987) define the writing plan as "a network of working goals ... constructed out of the writer's knowledge of goals, plans, constructs, and criteria for discourse and problem-solution in general." (p. 179)

<sup>8</sup> As Barlett (1982) observes, this idea is quite related to Piaget's concepts of egocentrism and decentered perception.

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*writer-based* perspective and do not take the audience into consideration. Although some improvement at the lower level can be observed when someone revises another writer's text, the interference of the writer's role cannot be overcome, even if the writer is separated from the text for some time.

Another characteristic of inexperienced writers is that they only focus their attention on what is actually written down on the page and are not able to detach themselves from the options present in the written text. This difficulty is accentuated by the deficient linguistic resources available to an inexperienced writer (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1987), who tends to be, as Hague and Mason (1986) point out, a *reluctant reviser*, due to the problems faced during the revising process. These problems drive inexperienced writers to perform *meaning-preserving* revisions (Porte, 1996).

Conversely, experienced writers spend more time when revising the texts, and "look back more and pause longer" (Stallard, in: Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) while evaluating their texts. Moreover, they pay more attention to problems involving the higher level. This is because they are able to put themselves in the place of the audience, thus verifying whether their texts develop the goals established in the writing plan, and checking to see if the texts are suitable for the hypothetical audience (Hayes et al., 1987). Experienced writers also have difficulties revising the formal aspects of the text (especially when dealing with their own texts), but they can overcome the difficulties easier than inexperienced writers, since they possess more *linguistic resources* (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Finally, Sommers (1984) presents two other criteria that distinguish experienced and inexperienced writers — the concept of writing reflected in their practice and verbalized in interviews, and the strategies they adopt while revising. To inexperienced writers, the writing process means translating "the thought to the page, and changing the language of speech to the more formal language of prose, the word to its synonym" (Sommers, 1984, p. 331). This procedure is classified by Sommers as the *thesaurus philosophy of writing*, which focuses on the word level, showing the writer's belief that the meaning of the text is already perfect, and that the text does not need to be revised at this level. These writers' limited strategies of revision and

linguistic resources make them adopt *teacher-based* or *textbook-based* rules while revising.

On the contrary, experienced writers regard the writing process as a never-ending product, a means of refining their thoughts, which demands constant revision in order to be reasonably understood by the audience. Thus, experienced writers concentrate their revision on the global aspects of the texts. Besides, the concern for the audience makes it easier to identify “incongruity between intention and execution, and requires these writers to make revisions on all levels” (Sommers, 1984, p. 334). That is, the experienced writer sees the revision process as holistic and recursive, and approaches the texts with different goals each time. Therefore, an experienced writer may opt for first revising the text concerning content and ideas, then revise it again to check organization, and finally check the text in terms of writing conventions.

#### REVISION IN THE CLASSROOM CONTEXT

In accordance with Witte (1985), I believe that the segmented fashion in which writing has been presented by traditional approaches has greatly influenced educators’ and students’ concept of revision. Through the analysis of conferences between writing instructors and students, Hull (1986) concludes that teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards revision are quite different, and that this difference negatively influences the improvement of the students’ writing skills. According to Hull (1986, p. 201), teachers’ traditional procedure to revise students’ texts is the following: (1) detect, identify, and label the problems; (2) develop (or appropriate from the grammar books) a taxonomy; (3) proofread; and (4) edit. All these steps require automatized skills concerning the usage of the standard written language. When teachers cannot find an explanation for an error (i.e., when the error does not find room in one of the automatized rules), they have to appeal to the writer’s intention and text meaning to explain and edit the error<sup>9</sup>. Students, on the other hand, seem to (1) know fewer

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<sup>9</sup> Hull’s (1986) generalized assertion that teachers adopt the strategy of resorting to meaning and intention to explain and edit errors in students’ texts seems rather

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rules; (2) see fewer errors; (3) emphasize meaning and intentionality, which are used to justify the choices they make and rules they adopt while revising the text.

Hull (1986) draws various conclusions from his findings: (1) The rule-based approach to revision frequently adopted by teachers is problematic for it tends to treat the writer's intentionality and the text meaning as secondary, or entirely disregard them; (2) Contrary to teachers, students regard intentionality as a primary element in their revisions, and this seems to blind them to the formal aspects of the text; (3) The result of these different concepts of the revision process is that students' writing is unlikely to profit from the revisions done by teachers since the students cannot understand them; and finally, (4) At the same time, teachers become frustrated when they see that their efforts to improve students' writing ability have no effect, and are likely to diminish the time they spend with revision activities.

Contrary to Hull (1986), Sommers (1984) suggests that beginning students regard revision as a *rewording activity*, i.e., their main concern is related with vocabulary choice, spelling, and repetition. The concern with intention and meaning as well as the *shape* (sentence level) of the arguments is part of the experienced writers' strategies. Taking into account Sommers' assumptions, we can say that, in the classroom situation, the teacher seems to play the role of the experienced writer, while the student is the inexperienced one.

The contradiction between Sommers' (1984) and Hull's (1986) ideas seems to be connected with the fact that they are talking about different situations in which revision can occur — teachers revising students' texts, and students revising their own texts. As we have seen, while revising their own texts, both inexperienced and experienced writers tend to be less aware of the problems concerning the mechanical aspects of the language. This happens because the writers know the intention and the meaning of the text, and have difficulty detaching themselves from both. Besides, inexperienced writers have limited linguistic resources, and are likely to believe that the texts are perfect in terms of content.

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optimistic, if we take into consideration that some teachers continue to adopt the strategy of simply crossing out what they see as an error.



## ROSANE SILVEIRA

The ideas of both Hull (1986) and Sommers (1984) match with Hague and Mason's (1986) assertion that students' difficulties in writing are, in part, the result of a "system that overemphasizes the student's final product and tends to ignore the process employed to produce it" (p.14). This emphasis on the final product is supported by the results of Zamel's (1985) research, in which she finds out that L<sub>2</sub> teachers tend to respond to their students' texts in the following way:

writing teachers misread the texts, are inconsistent in their corrections, make arbitrary corrections, write contradictory comments, provide vague prescriptions, impose abstract rules and standards, respond to texts as fixed and final products, and rarely make content-specific comments or offer specific strategies for revising the texts (Zamel, 1985, p. 86).

Therefore, students are likely to regard writing and revision as mechanical activities that have to be done quickly. In other words, they are not acquainted with the idea advocated by researchers that both writing and revising are recursive and never-ending processes (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hairstone, 1982; Sommers, 1984).

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