

The Investigation of L2 Writing Process Differences between Argumentative and Narrative Genres

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Abstract

English writing is not only an essential role but also a notable challenge for L2 learners. While studies have explored strategies for enhancing L2 writing proficiency by focusing on analyzing written products (Dizon, 2016; Pyo, 2020), there is a growing interest in investigating the L1 and L2 writing process (Abas & Aziz, 2016; Ranalli, Feng, & Chukharev-Hudilainen, 2018). Additionally, the role of genre has been recognized as a crucial part of L2 writing, enabling researchers to examine the discourse and linguistic features related to textual compositions (Pyo, 2020; Watanabe, 2017). However, limited research has investigated from the perspective of the writing process in genres. Therefore, the study aimed to explore the differences in the writing process between argumentative and narrative genres composed by L2 writers. Two participants were recruited and performed one task for each genre. Each movement in their writing was annotated and categorized into one of the five writing stages: Planning, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Inquiring. By comparing the writing stages in two genres, the results indicated a disparity in the time allocation to some extent. Moreover, it was also found that the participants tended to correct tense errors and vocabulary inquiring in narrative writing. In summary, this study has identified variations in the writing process between the two genres, contributing to the knowledge of the writing process in L2 writing. Moreover, the pedagogical implication could be helpful not only for L2 writing teachers to understand students' writing difficulties further but also for L2 learners to enhance their writing strategies.

Keywords: L2 writing process, Writing stages, Genres, Argumentative writing, Narrative writing

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Introduction

English writing is a crucial skill for not only language learning but also a range of purposes, such as job applications, business letters, and academic publications. However, writing is always challenging for L2 learners. Studies have investigated how to improve L2 writing through the lens of writing products (Dizon, 2016; Pyo, 2020). In contrast, the writing process in L1 and L2 has been explored not only for improving students' writing strategies but also for improving teaching (Abas & Aziz, 2016; Ranalli, Feng, & Chukharev-Hudilainen, 2018). Moreover, genres have played an essential role in L2 writing, allowing researchers to examine the discourse and linguistic features related to textual compositions (Pyo, 2020; Watanabe, 2017). According to Bruner (1986), genres can be divided into narrative and non-narrative discourse modes. In narratives, the text is typically about events involving individuals, actions, and the sequence of time and place. On the contrary, non-narrative texts focus more on specific ideas or beliefs, presenting and debating them in a structured and logical manner (Berman & Slobin, 1994). Therefore, researchers have examined the linguistic features used in different genres (Lu, 2011; Pyo, 2020; Wang & Wen, 2002; Watanabe, 2017). For example, Lu (2011) found that L2 English learners employed more complex expressions in writing an argumentative essay than in a narrative one, revealing that writers compose their work differently when encountering different genres. However, only few studies investigated genre from the perspective of the writing process. Therefore, this study explored the differences in the L2 writing process between argumentative and narrative genres. The researchers raised two research questions below:

- RQ1. What is the difference in time allocation of writing process stages between argumentative and narrative writing?
- RQ2. How does the behavior in writing argumentative and narrative essays differ in each stage of the writing process?

Methodology

The study aimed to explore the differences in the writing process between argumentative and narrative genres composed by L2 writers. Two graduate students from a University of Science and Technology in Southern Taiwan were recruited voluntarily and performed two writing tasks (one task for each genre). To maintain the quality of writing tasks, the participants' English proficiency was above 750 on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), which means they were at the level of B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR). The argumentative writing topic is "*Text is*

better than other type of communication, such as emails, telephone calls, or face-to-face communication or not." This topic was selected from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) mock exam and was related to participants' daily lives. The narrative writing topic is a four-picture story comprising three images and one section without a picture, allowing participants to create a new ending for the story. The picture story was selected from the College Entrance Examination Center and was utilized in the 2017 academic years' Subject Competency Test, which is a national test in Taiwan. In each writing, the time limit was 40 minutes, and the required length was 300 words minimum.

The whole writing process for the tasks was on Microsoft Word and video-recorded by Open Broadcaster Software (OBS). We developed video annotation software using Python, HTML, and JavaScript. Each movement was annotated and categorized into one of the five writing stages through the video annotation tool. The five stages were adopted by Williams (2003): Planning, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Inquiring (see Appendix A). The time allocation of each stage was assessed by calculating the time-spent percentage by each participant. Then, further analysis of the behavior of stages was conducted within the framework of error types of writing (Crossley, Bradfield, & Bustamante, 2019; Nordquist, 2018).

Results and Discussion

Time Allocation

Table 1 shows the time allocation of two participants at each writing process stage. According to Table 1, for S1's argumentative writing, the focus was on Planning (58.75%). In contrast, S1's narrative writing was more balanced between Planning (48.13%) and Drafting (48.12%). On the other hand, S2's argumentative writing emphasized Planning (78.71%) and also prioritized Planning (68.21%) in the narrative writing. Figure 1 provides a visual demonstration for the time spent and sequences of each stage during writing.

Table 1. Percentage of each writing stage

#	Genres	Writing Stage				
		Planning	Drafting	Revising	Editing	Inquiring
S1	Argumentative	58.75%	42.37%	0.79%	0.55%	1.0%
	Narrative	48.13%	48.12%	0.92%	0.61%	3.99%
S2	Argumentative	78.71%	26.74%	0.95%	0.31%	0%
	Narrative	68.21%	35.93%	0%	0.28%	0%

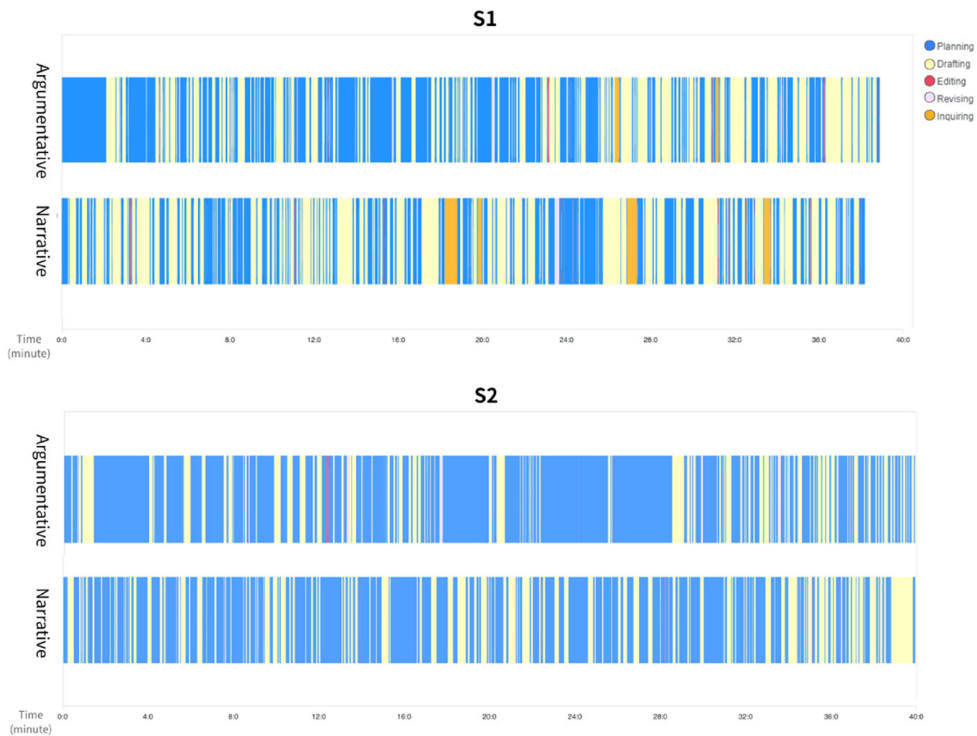


Figure 1. Time allocation of each writing stage in argumentative and narrative.

By comparing the writing stages in two genres, the results indicated disparity to some extent. In both genres, the Planning stage took the majority of the time. While there is no notable distinction between argumentative and narrative writing in the Planning stage, it still reveals that two participants allocated extended periods to brainstorm ideas for the argumentative essay compared to narrative writing. Previous studies have shown that texts in non-narrative genres often focus on specific ideas or beliefs (Berman & Ravid, 2008). Therefore, two participants in this study spent more time in the Planning stage in argumentative writing to collect background information and organize their ideas.

Interestingly, in the case of S1, the Inquiring stage in narrative writing allocated more time than in argumentative writing, as seen in Figure 1. This shows that the participant tended to look up words in dictionaries or translation tools while writing narrative tasks. Since the narrative genre mainly focuses on storytelling (Berman & Slobin, 1994), the writer would use specific words to describe the actions and objects in the picture story. As a result, in this study, the participant tried to search for precise word choices, which led to behavioral differences in the stage of Inquiring in narrative writing.

Behavior in Writing Stages

From analyzing the participants' action in each writing stage, the results indicated most stages were similar. In the beginning of the writing, participants organized ideas for their writing task in the Planning stage. During the Drafting stage, participants wrote down sentences to express their ideas. The Revising stage involved participants reviewing previous sentences and making some changes. In the Inquiring stage, participants engaged in searching for vocabularies or translations.

However, in the Editing stages, some different actions were taken when participants addressed errors between argumentative and narrative genres. There were two main types of errors in writing: grammatical errors and mechanical errors (Crossley et al., 2019; Nordquist, 2018). For S1's argumentative writing, it was found that grammatical errors was 74.79%, while mechanical errors accounted for 25.21%. Conversely, in narrative writing, grammatical errors represented 50.11%, and mechanical errors comprised 49.89%. For S2's argumentative writing, grammatical errors were found at 12.93%, with mechanical errors making up 87.07%. In S2's narrative writing, grammatical errors were noted at 64.05%, while mechanical errors were at 33.15%.

These findings show a visible difference in the Editing stage between the two genres. In argumentative writing, participants mainly focused on one type of error. S1 focused more on grammatical errors, such as subject-verb agreement, than mechanical errors, such as punctuation and spelling, while S2 was reversed. Notably, although the number of grammatical errors identified in these two genres was similar, the participants demonstrated a tendency to correct tense errors particularly within the narrative writing genre but not in the argumentative essay. For instance, a participant edited "*I will not say it was...*" to "*I would not say it was....*" in the narrative essay. In line with previous studies, past tense usage is crucial in narrative writing, affecting the coherence and engagement of the story (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992). Therefore, it is essential for writers to use the appropriate tense in narrative writing.

Conclusion

This study has identified variations in the writing process between the two genres, contributing to the knowledge of the writing process in L2 writing. English writing teachers can enhance their lesson plans and resources based on different writing genres. For instance, since the results indicated that students spent more time on the Planning stage in the argumentative genre, teachers could focus on enhancing students' information-gathering skills for argumentative writing. Furthermore, in the narrative genre, students tended to spend

more time in the Inquiring stage, which suggests that teachers expand glossaries for instructing narrative writing. Also, these pedagogical implications could not only help L2 learners identify areas for enhancement in different genres of writing but also help L2 writing teachers understand students' writing difficulties further.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Stages of the writing process (Williams, 2003)

Stages	Definition
Planning	Developing a plan to achieve the aim of the work
Drafting	Producing words that match plan for the work
Revising	Making changes that let text and plan match, such as adding words and improving word choice.
Editing	Focusing on sentence-level concerns, such as punctuation, sentence length, grammar, and spelling.
Inquiring	Checking for anything in writing, such as synonyms and translations (in dictionaries, etc.).