Translated and Direct Writing in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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Teaching English as a Foreign Language, MA Programme and
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Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Professor Višnja Pavičić Takač

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Content

Summary

The topic of this research is translated and direct writing in teaching English as a foreign language. The first part covers the second language writing process as well as an overview of studies on translation processes in writing. The second part is a report on the conducted study with upper-intermediate learners of English. Students performed similarly in both essays but stronger students' essays were better in terms of style and the final grade in direct writing mode. Students reported that translation is more time-consuming but makes the writing process easier while direct writing is faster and encourages thinking in English.

Key words: direct writing, translated writing, learner attitudes

Sažetak

Ovo istraživanje bavi se pisanjem temeljenom na prevođenju s materinskoga jezika i izravnim pisanjem na ciljnom jeziku u nastavi engleskog kao stranog jezika. Prvi dio rada prikazuje proces pisanja na drugom jeziku i pregled istraživanja procesa prevođenja u pisanju. Drugi dio rada iznosi rezultate provedenog istraživanja s učenicima više srednje razine engleskog jezika. Učenici su ostvarili slične rezultate u oba eseja ali su eseji boljih učenika bili bolje stilizirani i ostvarili bolju konačnu ocjenu kada su pisali izravno na engleskom. Učenici su napisali da prevođenje oduzima puno vremena ali olakšava proces pisanja dok je izravno pisanje brže i potiče razmišljanje na engleskom.

Ključne riječi: izravno pisanje, pisanje prevođenjem s materinskoga jezika, stavovi učenika

1. Introduction

The present study explores translated and direct writing of a short essay in English as a foreign language (EFL). Inspired by studies that explored the role of first language (L1) in second language (L2) writing, the present study sets to find out how writing first in L1 and then translating it to L2 compares to writing directly in L2. Some previous studies on this topic (Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992; Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000; Tavakoli et al., 2014) reported different results, which is why it needs to be explored further and in different language settings.

The ability to write in English is an important academic skill that a student of EFL should acquire to be prepared for today's globalised world. Unfortunately, many learners of the English language struggle with writing, which is why teachers of EFL are constantly trying to find new ways to help their students and make their writing experience easier. It is important for teachers of EFL to understand what enhances and what hinders their students' L2-writing performance. In the past, problems with L2 proficiency, and thus L2 writing, have been associated with L1 interference. Recently, a more complex research of the role of L1 has emerged. For L2 writing research, studying the relationship between L1 and L2 writing is an opportunity for deeper understanding of the ways in which learners produce written texts.

Especially important for Croatian L2 writers is their time in high-school because they start learning how to express more complex ideas in both L1 and L2 essays. For this reason, participants selected for present study were upper-intermediate learners of English attending grammar school. Since they are almost adult and cognitively mature, these learners of L2 might have complex ideas that they want to convey in their writings. Inadequate knowledge of L2 may push them to turn to their L1 to express those ideas (Karim and Nassaji, 2013). This reliance on the L1 can have both positive and negative effect. The present study will allow students to use their L1 while writing a draft in translated writing and compare it to writing directly, when students might use their L1 only mentally.

In both broad field of education and the specific field of L2 education, it is important to understand students' attitudes and perceptions. For that reason, the present study explored students' attitudes towards the two writing modes with post-writing questionnaires. Understanding how students feel about writing and what helps them is something every teacher of EFL finds valuable.

2. Writing Process

2.1. L1 Writing

Writing is an act of composing that implies the ability to tell or retell information in the form of narratives or description, or to transform information into original texts, as in argumentative compositions (Myles, 2002).

In general, the writing process consists of pre-writing, writing, and post-writing, sometimes referred to as preparation, drafting, and revision (Brown and Hood, 1989). Hayes and Flower (1980) created one of the most famous models of writing in which they identified subprocesses of the composing process as well as their organization. Hayes and Flower's model of the writing process, as shown in figure 1, proposes that writing consists of planning, translating, and reviewing.

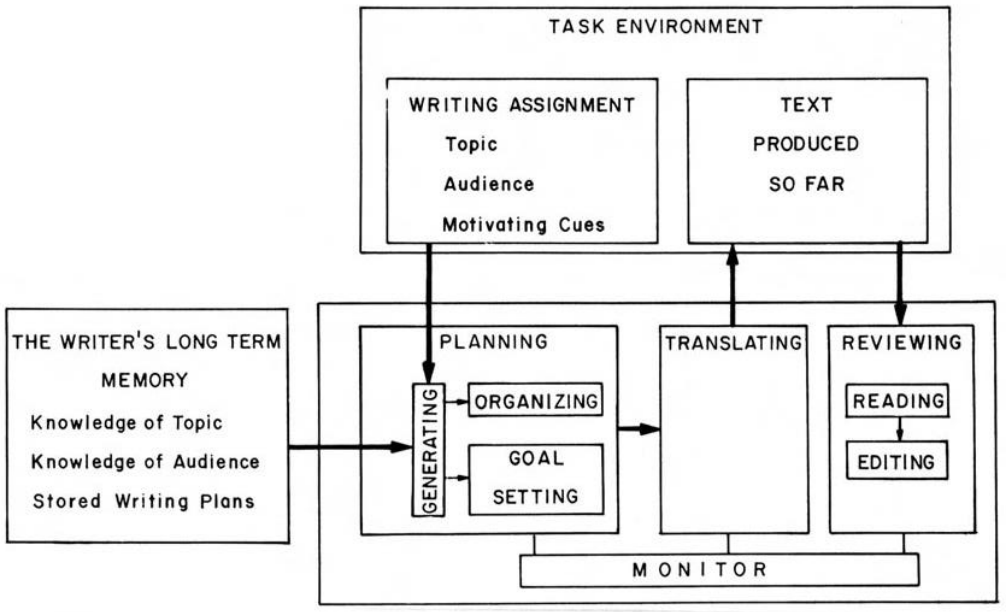

Figure 1. Hayes and Flower's (1980) Model of the Writing Process

Task environment in Hayes and Flower's model represents everything outside of the writer. It refers to the writing assignment and the information relevant for writer's motivation. The writer's long term memory consists of stored information about different topics, writing conventions, and the reader. Brown and Hood (1989) refer to these two factors as situational circumstances. In other words, the learners' writing process depends on the reader (who they are writing to), the purpose (why they are writing), the topic (what they are writing about), and the situation (place, time, feeling). As for the writing process, Hayes and Flower's model starts with planning. When

writers plan, they generate and organize ideas and set goals. Next is translation, where students take material from memory and form sentences. Finally, in revision, writers read the text produced so far and edit it if necessary. As the authors note, the model is recursive and the whole writing process can appear as part of editing subprocess. Editing can interrupt any other process which implies that planning, translation, and revision can appear at any time. As Hyland (2003) notices, all work can be revised even before any text has been produced at all because the writer can jump backward or forward to any activity.

The ability to write well is not naturally acquired and it requires skills and practice. When a learner is producing language, he or she is engaging in a complex cognitive activity - thinking. Byrnes (2006) argues that thinking is intimately related to language. Learners mentally use language not only to convey the meaning, but also to verbalise their thoughts. In other words, learners mentally use language to mediate thinking. That "silent manifestation of speech directed to the self" is often called inner speech (de Guerrero, 2005:14). Vygotsky (1986, as cited in de Guerrero, 2005) describes it as "mental draft" (Vygotsky, 1986:243, as cited in de Guerrero, 2005) and Sokolov (1972) as "soundless, mental speech, arising at the instant we think about something, plan or solve problems in our mind, recall books read or conversations heard, read and write silently" (Sokolov, 1972:1). The relationship between thought and writing is a sharply debated problem in psychology, logic, and linguistics (Ransdell and Barbier, 2002). Present study focuses on L2 writing, which is why thinking and writing will be explained in the context of mental translation.

2.2. L2 Writing

Although both L1 and L2 writers compose using activities like planning, writing, and revising, Silva (1993) claims that L1 and L2 writing are linguistically, rhetorically, and strategically different. Adult L2 writers plan and revise less, and transcribe with more difficultly. Furthermore, in EFL writing, students' L1 writing ability, L2 proficiency, and meta-knowledge of L2 writing significantly influence the quality of the writing product (Sasaki and Hirose, 1996). As seen in figure 2, Sasaki and Hirose (1996) introduced significant and background variables that influence L2 writing process.

In their model, composing competence is a factor affecting both L1 and L2 writing ability. Ransdell and Barbier (2002) note that L1 and L2 are tied to one another and if a writer is skilled in L1, he or she should be able to use general strategies that help control the impact of L2 writing task demands. Furthermore, the model shows that L2 proficiency influences the L2 writing product by means of writing fluency while L1 writing ability manifests itself through the use of

writing strategies. It is reported that people who do not write well in L1 have difficulty planning, manipulating, monitoring, or revising their ideas in L2 (Bosher, 1998, as cited in Cumming, 2001). The two background characteristics (writing experience in L1/L2 and confidence in L2 writing) are also potential factors. L2 writing is very complex because it requires a sufficient level of spelling, lexical, and syntactic knowledge in L2 language and activation of planning, transcription, and reviewing. It also demands metalinguistic knowledge, which Sasaki and Hirose deem extremely important. Metalinguistic knowledge is not only knowledge about language as meaning but also knowledge about language as form (Ransdell and Barbier, 2002).

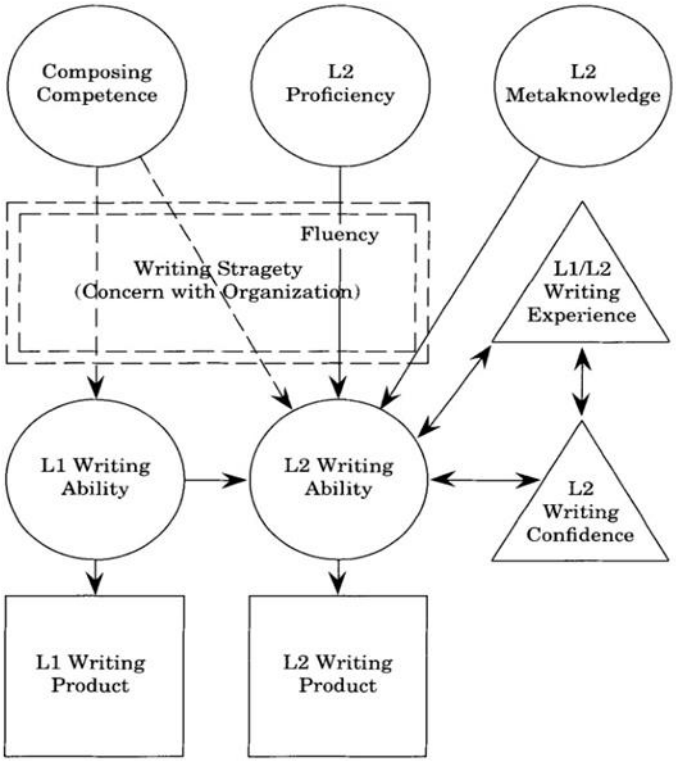

Figure 2. Sasaki and Hirose's (1996) Explanatory Model of EFL Writing.

Interest in L2 writing process is a recent trend in the field of L2 writing research. Cumming (2001) writes that L2 writing research focuses on the three basic elements of the L2 writing activity: the socio-cultural context where the writer writes and learns to write, the produced text, and the thinking the writer engages in to produce the text (Cumming, 2001). These theoretical orientations are often referred to as writing as socializing, writing as product, and writing as process. Research in L2 writing began with product-oriented approach and shifted to process-oriented research. The process approach is an approach to writing that focuses on what the writer does (planning, revising, etc.) instead of what the final text looks like (spelling, grammar, etc) (Applebee, 1986, as cited in Onozawa, 2010). Jun (2008) noticed that research on L2 writing

process mainly focused on the role of L1, teacher and peer writing feedback, and writing strategies.

Writing strategies are tools that learners use to deal with the complex task of producing a text. Although writing models can tell us a lot about the writing process, all writers use different strategies, which is why each writing process is different. Based on the reports of his learners, Leki (1995) provides ten categories of L2 writing strategies: clarifying strategies (understanding the task better through questions), focusing strategies (researching the topic), relying on past writing experience, taking advantage of first language or culture (mentally or in a written form), using current experience or feedback, looking for models (finding examples of the assignment), using current or past L2 writing training, accommodating teacher's demands, resisting teacher' demands, and managing competing demands (dealing with the various loads the students carries in order to complete their responsibility in the allotted time). Researchers compared L2 writing to L1 writing strategies to see what was unique about the L2 writing (Cumming, 1989, as cited in Cumming, 2001; Silva, 1992; Uzawa 1996). Studies imply that although learners use similar writing strategies in both writing processes, they spend a lot of time coming up with appropriate words and thinking about the form of the language when writing in L2 (Cumming, 2001). Berman (1994) and Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2000) explored the similarities between the L1 and L2 writing and concluded that learners transfer their essay writing skills between languages. In EFL classroom, educators often try to find strategies that lead to best results and understand their students' preferences. Since present study deals with how translated writing compares to direct writing, it will focus on translated writing as a process in which translation is a writing strategy.

2.2.1. Mental Translation

Like in L1, L2 writers use language to mediate the thinking and convey meaning. Thinking of ideas and formulating complex sentences can be problematic. In L2 writing, the relationship between thinking and writing is complex because students have two languages at their disposal. Wang and Wen (2002) and Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2000) claim that both high and low proficiency students often think in L1 while writing in L2, while van Weijen et al. (2009) reports that more proficient writers use their L1 less. Thinking in the native language, says Knutson (2006), is a way to try and facilitate problem-solving ability in L2 writing. L2 writers have to instruct themselves on how and what to do while writing in L2 and they use both languages to do so. The process of privately using L1 in L2 writing is referred to as “mental translation” and it interests researchers in terms of similarities between L1 and L2 writing strategies, the role of L1

translation, the role of L2 proficiency, negative effects of L1 use, etc. (Karim and Nassaji, 2013). Literature on relationship between thinking and language production often uses terms like "inner speech", "mental translation", and "language switching" and provides definitions of each without clearly stating why they are different. Present study will use the term "mental translation" because it is the one most often used in L2 writing research.

Some EFL educators believe that learners need to think in L2 in order to be more proficient and fluent but recent research revised the role of L1 in L2 writing (de Guererro, 2005). Authors like Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) claim that the complex nature of L2 composing process pushes researchers and teachers to acknowledge the positive role of L1 in L2 writing. In recent studies, scholars refer to the role of L1 in L2 writing "not only as a complex mental operation but also as part of a repertoire of strategies L2 learners use in the course of L2 acquisition" (Karim and Nassaji, 2013:120). Friedlander (1990, as cited in Hu, 2003) even suggests that L2 writers plan, write, and create better texts if they are able to plan in the language in which they learned about the given topic. For example, if a student learns about global warming in L1 and has to write about it in L2, he will produce a better text if he plans for the writing process in L1. This idea comes from belief that languages are stored separately in memory and only interact through mental translation. It is not surprising that many authors found that majority of L2 writers often or always think in L1 when writing in L2 (Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992; Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000; Tavakoli et al., 2014; Ahmadian et al., 2016).

Several authors yield important insight into mental translation and language switching processes. Lay (1982, as cited in Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000), Wang and Wen (2002), Woodall (2002), and van Weijen et al. (2009) used the think-aloud method to gather data directly from participants who reported on their thought process as they were performing a writing task. They found that L2 writers think in L1 when they need to think of and organise their ideas (Lay, 1982, as cited in Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000; Wang and Wen, 2002; Lifang, 2008).

Authors dealing with switching between L1 and L2 and mentally translating ideas and vocabulary claim that almost all students have to think in L1 while writing directly in L2. In L2 writing tasks, teachers of EFL can either see the mental usage of L1 as a problem and encourage their students to try to always think in L2 or they can try to find ways in which to improve the mental translation by making the students aware of their writing process.

2.2.2. Direct and Translated Writing

In direct L2 writing, students have more freedom to control their writing process. Students do not have to use specific strategies but it is implied that they do not rely much on their L1. In

direct writing, students are instructed to first write and then revise. This process is often easier for more proficient students who conduct less mental translation. In the EFL classroom, the writing task is usually composition of an essay. Essays have rules and conventions in terms of how the final product has to look, but they do not demand that students use any particular writing strategy.

Translated writing is a writing mode where L2 writers compose an L1 draft and then translate it in L2. Translation is a strategy usually used by less skilled students (Jun, 2008). Typically, students of L2 use translation when learning new vocabulary or trying to understand complex grammatical structures. Dujmović (2006) noticed that students thought that translation of words, complex ideas, and even whole paragraphs is a good way of learning English. Additionally, authors like Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) claim that translation might help weaker writers think more deeply and freely about given topics but note that frequent use of word-by-word translation might hinder the writing process.

Uzawa (1996) writes that L1 and L2 writing are similar because students pay attention to the same things, but when they translate, students focus more on language use. They are also forced to use language slightly beyond their levels when they are translating and the writing seems to be conducted at "*i* + 1" level, based on the "pushed output" hypothesis by Swain (1985, as cited in Uzawa, 1996). Namely, Swain argued that learners have to have the opportunity to produce language that is a little higher than the learner's present level ("*i* + 1 level output). In other words, the context of writing can help learners use the forms of the L2 through practice that may push learners to convert their acquired competence in L2 into skilful performance (Cumming, 2001).

Translation can be more difficult for some students. Fujii (2012) found that when writing directly, L2 texts are more grammatically and lexically accurate than when students are given a text to translate. The translations into L2 are sometimes incomprehensible and resemble strings of words with little construction. Nonetheless, the fact that L2 writers use their L1 in one way or another in L2 writing process makes the exploration of translated writing necessary and relevant.

2.3. Relevant Research Review

2.3.1. Previous Studies on Direct and Translated Writing

There is a sufficient number of studies on mental translation and other ways in which L1 occurs in L2 writing but fewer have explored the effect of full translation of a written task in the L1 on the quality of the text compared to direct L2 writing (Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000). Direct and translated writing are techniques of L2 writing whose benefits could be explored

more efficiently if they are compared and contrasted. The following are studies that explored the two writing modes with learners of different language backgrounds and different L2 proficiencies.

Kobayashi & Rinnert (1992) were the first ones to compare the two writing processes. They set out to explore if the quality of learners' written compositions in L2 is affected by the language of composition and whether it varies with learners' L2 proficiency. The study also explored the errors in the two writing modes, whether the features of written texts are related to learners' oral skills and grammar knowledge, and the students' attitudes towards the writing tasks. Participants were 48 Japanese university students. They were divided into two groups (higher and lower proficiency levels) based on their results on a language test that evaluated their grammar knowledge and oral skills. On the first day of the study some participants wrote directly while others wrote first in Japanese. The students could choose of four presented topics and had 60 minutes to compose an essay. The same procedure was repeated on the second day, with the writing task being alternated between the two groups. On the third day, the students were given their graded essays to reread and comment on as part of their response to a questionnaire. The results showed that translations were rated significantly higher than the direct compositions. Lower-level students particularly benefited from translation in terms of content, organization, and style. Higher-proficiency students did not benefit from translation as much as lower-proficiency students. Furthermore, if the 4 students who benefited from translation were to be removed from the higher proficiency group, there would have been no differences between the two writing processes. Both groups benefited least from translation in terms of organization, but their vocabulary use and variety of syntactic structures was better. The results of the study inspired other authors to explore how translation compares to direct writing with different L2 proficiency-level students.

In an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Brooks (1996, as cited in Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000) explored translation as a writing strategy for learners of French as a foreign language. In this study, 31 intermediate level students wrote directly in French as well as first in L1 (English) and then translated it into French. The results indicated that translation could significantly enrich learners' L2 writing. The writers' translated written product had higher syntactic complexity with higher levels of subordination and coordination. The studies by Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) and by Brooks (1996) indicated that for some lower-level students, thinking in L1 while writing in L2 could lead to lower quality of written product while writing out the ideas in L1 and then translating them could be beneficial (Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000). In the same year that Brooks found that the students could benefit from translation, a similar study (Ali, 1996, as cited

in Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000) found that the 60 students who wrote both directly in L2 (English) and first in L1 (Arabic) and then in L2 performed better at direct writing. Studies to come continued exploring the two writing modes in different language setting with students of different native languages.

Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2000) conducted a study on direct and translated essay writing in the L2 classroom with 39 intermediate level students of French of different L1 backgrounds. Out of the 39 students, 30 were females and 9 males and the average age was 20.6. Cohen and Brooks-Carson wanted to find out whether writing a text first in L1 and then translating it could lead to better quality of the essay. Authors also compared the strategies participants used while writing in L1 and L2. Students wrote each essay in two 30-minute class periods. In the translated mode, students were given 12 minutes to write down a draft in their L1 and then 18 to translate it into French. In the direct writing mode, students were given 20 minutes to write on the topic in French only, and 10 minutes for revision. In the translated writing mode, the production of the translation was seen as "a reworking of the L1 draft" (Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000:22). The results of the study showed that for all 39 students, the mean performance on the direct writing was significantly better than the mean grade of the translated writing. It was concluded that the students benefited more from direct writing mode.

Similarly, Lifang (2008) explored the results of the two writing modes with Chinese learners. In Lifang's pilot study, twelve students (four lower-level, four intermediate-level, and four higher-level learners of English) wrote two short essays. The participants were asked to write on each topic for 40 minutes. On one occasion they wrote first in L1 for 15 minutes and then translated it in L2 for 25 minutes. On the second occasion the participants wrote exclusively in English for 30 minutes, with 10 minutes for revision. The essays were graded by two researches for content, organization, and style. Like in the study by Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992), the students performed better at translations, especially the lower-level group. Lifang's study was only a pilot study which is why it had noticeably less participants, which is why conclusions should be considered with caution.

Ismail and Alsheikh (2012) found significant difference between 36 Iranian students' language use in direct and translated writing modes in favour of the direct mode. In their study, the participants were female university students studying to become English teachers in public schools after their graduation. The time limit for the writing of each essay was 30 to 40 minutes and no dictionaries or other helping tools were allowed. The overall results showed that by and large students benefited more from direct writing, contrary to the findings of Uzawa (1996) and in line with the findings of Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2000). The authors noted that the contexts

of the studies and different language proficiency levels are obviously important factors in all interpretations of the studies.

One of the most recent studies on direct and translated writing by Tavakoli et al. (2014) found that translation is not an effective L2 writing strategy for all learners. In this study, 60 Iranian elementary-level EFL learners wrote directly as well as first in their L1 and then translating. In this study, the participants wrote their essays at home and then brought them to the class. Overall, the students performed better in the direct writing task. They performed better in terms of expression, grammar, and transition. The results were in line with the findings of Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2000) but refuted the results of Kobayashi and Rinnert's (1992) and Brooks' (1996) studies which found translation to be beneficial for students.

The results of previous research on direct and translated L2 writing cannot provide general conclusions. Different students' proficiency levels, language context, classroom atmosphere, graded components, and even topics and time given for writing all play a role in the writing process. Some authors found translated writing to be beneficial to low or intermediate proficiency students (Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992; Brooks, 1996, as cited in Cohen and Brooks Carson, 2000; Lifang, 2008), and others reported that the direct writing mode led to better L2 written products (Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000; Ismail and Alsheikh, 2012; Tavakoli et al., 2014). The topic needs further research with different proficiency level students and in different language contexts in order to get a clearer picture of L2 writing process and students' perceptions.

2.3.2. Previous Research on Students' Attitudes towards Direct and Translated Writing

Considering how important it is to know students' perceptions and attitudes for better understanding of the SLA (Silva, 1992), many of the above mentioned studies dealing with direct and translated writing analysed not only learners' writing abilities, but also their attitudes.

As previously mentioned, in the study by Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992) most of the lower-proficiency students benefited from translation while the higher-proficiency group overall did not defer in the two writing processes. Still, 77% of all the students favoured direct composing process, although only 53% of the lower proficiency group preferred direct writing. When asked to explain why they found direct writing easier, students reported that it is mainly because of the demanding nature of translation and because they can use simpler ideas, more familiar words, and basic structures when writing directly. Furthermore, several participants said that they preferred direct writing mode because they liked how it pushed them to think in L2 (English). Students who found translation easier said that they developed their ideas easier that way, that

they could express their opinions and thoughts more clearly and that the use of dictionary helped them translate the words more easily. As for mental translation, half of the higher-level students reported that they used less than 50% of Japanese mentally when writing directly. Most of the lower-proficiency students reported using 50% or more Japanese.

That students perceive direct writing as very beneficial was confirmed by Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2000). In their study, students reported that writing directly helped them learn the language and focus on the expressions of the L2 (French). The students also indicated they often did not find direct writing faster or easier. They even reported that they thought they were using better vocabulary when writing in translated mode, although they actually performed better in the direct writing mode.

Similar to Kobayashi and Rinnet (1992) and Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2000), Lifang (2008) also found that most (75%) of students preferred direct writing, mainly because they had problems with completing the translation on time. Students reported that direct writing could help them cultivate the sense of language and create a habit of thinking in English. Just like the participants in the Kobayashi and Rinnert's (1992) study, the students in Lifang's study saw usage of familiar and simple words as an advantage of the direct writing. As for the disadvantages of the direct writing, students said that it sometimes limited their ideas. One advantage of translated writing that the students named was that it helped them think about ideas more clearly and deeply. As mentioned, the biggest disadvantage of translated writing was that it was too time-consuming. Although in this study most students benefited from translation, they mostly felt that direct writing suits them better, just like in the previous studies.

Students' attitudes were also explored by Ismail and Alsheikh (2012) who found that students see translation as an advantage in terms of idea generating and expressing more details with better organization. Most of the students actually saw more benefits in translated writing mode. 48% of students reported that direct writing is easier and quicker but only 32% of students said that they preferred it to translation. Still, majority of the students reported that translation is very difficult. Students reported that the biggest disadvantage of translation is the very process of translating which is confusing and difficult.

Tavakoli et al. (2014) reported that 85% of their participants preferred direct writing. Students said that direct writing was faster, helped them focus on English expressions and all in all, a good way to learn English, similar to Cohen and Brooks-Carson's (2000) report. Like in Lifang's (2008) pilot study, students saw thinking in English as an advantage of direct writing. Overall, they found translation to be harder although they expressed that they felt their essays were better organized.

In most of the studies on direct and translated L2 writing, majority of the participants saw at least a few advantages in both writing modes. Direct writing seemed to be the preferred way of composing, although students mentally used their L1 while writing in L2. The main problem with translation seemed to be the fact that it is time-consuming, while the main problem with direct writing, as expressed by students, was that it was harder to think of ideas. With these results in mind, it is necessary for present study to also explore which writing mode the students prefer and why. Understanding students' perceptions is useful for both the student and the teacher in order to know how to write in L2 and bring awareness to students' strong and weak points.

3. Research

3.1. Aim

Inspired by previous studies, especially the study conducted by Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2000) and Lifang's pilot study (2008), the aims of this research were to find out whether EFL students benefit from direct/translated writing. Since previously mentioned studies mostly dealt with lower or intermediate proficiency students of L2, this study included participants at upper-intermediate level. In addition, the study set out to compare weaker and stronger students' results, to find out how often the students turned to their L1 when they wrote directly in L2 as well as to explore students' attitudes towards the two writing modes. The study addressed the following questions:

1. How does writing a short essay directly in a L2 compare to writing the essay in L1 and then translating it? Does the quality of the essay vary with students' L2 proficiency?
2. What do students consider to be the relative advantages and disadvantages of the direct and the translated writing modes and which do they prefer?

3.2. Participants and instruments

There were 43 participants in this study. They were all 3rd and 4th graders attending grammar school in Osijek, Croatia, and at the upper-intermediate level of learning EFL. On average, the students had been learning English for 11 years. Participants were classified into two groups: stronger (21) and weaker (22), according to their grade in English, how they performed in the essays, and the opinion of their English teacher. Their self-evaluation was also taken into account. Stronger students were those students with excellent or very good grades in English, while weaker students were average or below average students (with good or sufficient grades) of English. Out of the 43 students, 23 were male and 20 female. The students were between 16 and 19 years old (the average age being 17.28, SD = .854).

Writing tasks were used for essay writing. There were two essay topics, one for the direct and the other for the translated essay writing mode. The topics were presented in the form of declarative sentences and students were instructed to write on whether they agree or disagree with the statement and provide arguments. For translated short essay writing the topic was "Honesty is not always the best policy". The topic for direct short essay writing was "School tests are not effective". The topics of essays were chosen because they would make students want to express their attitudes, which were important for the comparison of content,

organization, and style of the two writing modes. The instructor orally provided their translations in Croatian in order to make the topics as clear as possible to the students.

In addition, a post-writing questionnaire was administered to find out students' attitudes towards the translated and direct writing. The post-writing questionnaire was adapted from two questionnaires by Lifang (2008) into one. Present study used questionnaires because it focused on students' overall attitudes towards the writing modes and their reasons for thinking in L1 or L2. It consisted of a few questions to obtain demographic information on the students' age, gender, years of learning EFL, and their own assessment of their English proficiency. The following ten questions dealt with students' perceptions about the mental usage of L1 in L2 writing as well as their attitudes towards the translated and direct L2 writing. Seven of those questions were open-ended so the students had freedom to write down what they think in their own words. The questions were translated from English into Croatian and students were instructed to write in Croatian, so that they could express their attitudes and thoughts more easily. The students filled in the questionnaire in 5 to 10 minutes. All of the essays and questionnaires were collected by the instructor and then graded and analysed. The answers by the participants were translated into English for the purposes of this study. The Croatian version of the questionnaire used in present study is provided in the appendix 1.

3.3. Procedure

The experiment was conducted over the course of two days during regular English classes. On the first day, students wrote first in Croatian and then translated the draft into English. They were instructed to write the draft for around 15 minutes and that they would then have 20 minutes to translate it. They were told to write a short essay of about 150 words (or around half a page) and to organise it in three paragraphs (introduction, main part, and conclusion). Students were told that the essays would be graded for content, style, and organization and that it is not a pro-con essay but rather an essay for them to argue one point and express their arguments. The students were motivated by the opportunity to earn a grade if they were satisfied with it. Students were given the topic and were given five minutes to think about it or write down a few ideas. The instructor told the students that they could ask any questions about the title or the topic in general in L1 or L2 in the five minutes that they were given to prepare. The instructor also stressed that no dictionaries or other helping devices would be allowed. Dictionaries were prohibited because their introduction would have created another variable in the writing process, as stressed by Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2000).

On the second day, the students wrote directly in English. The instructions were repeated, but this time they were given 20 minutes to write directly and 10 minutes to revise. The students also had 5 minutes to think about the topic or ask any questions about it. This time, students were instructed to ask questions in English, as a warm-up activity. Once again, they were told not to use any helping devices, like dictionaries. In both writing tasks, students were not permitted to hand in their essays before the allotted time finished so that they would not disrupt other students and, more importantly, so that they would really focus on their writing. The allotted time was given because it is similar to real test conditions that the students are used to. On the second day, they were also given the post-writing questionnaire which they filled out immediately after they finished writing the essay.

The short essays were graded for style, organization, and content, as seen in appendix 2. When grading the essays and written products in general, L2 teachers tend to focus on errors and identifying problems in students' control of the language. It can sometimes be forgotten that the main purpose of writing is to convey meaning (Hyland, 2002). Many L2 learners can construct syntactically accurate sentences and yet are not able to produce appropriate written texts, which is why it was more important for the raters in the present study to see whether students' ideas and thought processes are better in one of the writing modes, rather than to analyse the errors they made. The ratings consisted of holistic judgments on a 5-point scale (max=5, min=1). Each component had two subcomponents that were graded. Under the component of style, the graded subcomponents were vocabulary (sophisticated range, variety, appropriate register) and form (variety of sentence beginnings, structure of sentences correct). The component of organization included the subcomponents of logical sequencing (ideas following logically within paragraphs), and of unity and clarity (ideas throughout paper relating to main point; ideas easy to understand). As for content, the graded units were specifics (vivid examples, supporting details) and developed idea (explanation or elaboration of the main idea). The grading system was similar to Lifang's (2008) adaptation of Kobayashi and Rinnert's (1992) grading scale. The essays were graded by the researcher and the students' English teacher. The grading was done separately and then compared. In occasional differences in grades of subcomponents, the researcher and the teacher came to an agreement.

3.4. Results

3.4.1. Direct and Translated Essays

Out of 43 students who participated in the study, 16 got a better final grade when writing directly while less than a third (10 students) got a better final grade when translating. For 17 students there was no difference in the final essay grade in both writing modes.

Paired t-test was used to compare the mean of all the elements of essay grading and the final grades from translated and direct writing. It showed that the mean was similar in all the components although it was slightly higher for the final grade in direct writing. Table 1 shows the descriptives for graded components and final essay grades and the results of the paired samples t-test. There were no significant differences between the grades of grading subcomponents and the final grades in translated and direct essays.

Table 1: Comparison of mean grades for the components and the final grade of translated and direct writing

Essay grades	Mean	SD	t	sig.
Direct essay: specifics	3.15	1.00	-.805	.425
Translated essay: specifics	3.28	1.08		
Direct essay: idea development	3.17	.91	-.274	.785
Translated essay: idea development	3.23	1.15		
Direct essay: logical sequencing	3.19	1.18	-.550	.585
Translated essay: logical sequencing	3.28	1.10		
Direct essay: unity and clarity	3.21	1.13	-.424	.673
Translated essay:unity and clarity	3.28	1.01		
Direct essay: vocabulary	2.99	1.06	.973	.336
Translated essay: vocabulary	2.84	.95		
Direct essay: form	3.00	1.18	1.655	.105
Translated essay: form	2.77	.95		
Direct essay: final grade	3.35	1.04	1.308	.198
Translated essay: final grade	3.16	1.02		

3.4.2. Stronger and Weaker Students' Results

The students were classified into two categories: stronger and weaker students (or more and less able writers). More than a half of stronger students (12 students) got a better final grade in

the direct writing mode. Five of them got the same final grade for translated and direct written essays. Only four performed better in translated writing mode. Table 2 shows that there were significant differences between stronger students' direct and translated essay grading subcomponents vocabulary and form and the final grade.

The second group consisted of weaker students. Overall, twelve students performed the same in both translated and direct writing mode, six students got a better final grade when they were writing with translation, and only four got a better grade when they wrote directly in English. Still, in this group, the six students who wrote a better essay in translated writing mode, as noticed by their teacher, were the ones who had the most problems with English in general while the twelve students who performed the same were average English learners. A paired samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the direct and translated writing modes on the grading subcomponents and the final grade for each group. Table 3 shows that there were no significant differences between weaker students' essay grades.

Table 2: Comparison of mean grades for the components and the final grade of translated and direct writing for stronger students

Essay grades	Mean	SD	t	sig.
Direct essay: specifics	3.81	.75	.317	.754
Translated essay: specifics	3.71	1.06		
Direct essay: idea development	3.86	.66	.679	.505
Translated essay: idea development	3.71	1.10		
Direct essay: logical sequencing	4.05	.74		
Translated essay: logical sequencing	3.81	.98	1.045	.309
Direct essay: unity and clarity	4.10	.70	1.000	.329
Translated essay:unity and clarity	3.86	.96		
Direct essay: vocabulary	3.81	.87	2.121	.047*
Translated essay: vocabulary	3.38	.81		
Direct essay: form	3.95	.81	3.833	.001*
Translated essay: form	3.33	.80		
Direct essay: final grade	4.29	.54	-2.351	.029*
Translated essay: final grade	3.76	.94		

*p<0.05

Table 3: Comparison of mean grades of translated and direct writing for weaker students

Essay grades	Mean	SD	t	sig.
Direct essay: specifics	2.46	.16	-1.523	.143
Translated essay: specifics	2.86	.20		
Direct essay: idea development	2.55	.60	-.865	.397
Translated essay: idea development	2.77	1.02		
Direct essay: logical sequencing	2.36	.90	-1.748	.095
Translated essay: logical sequencing	2.77	.97		
Direct essay: unity and clarity	2.36	.73	-1.702	.104
Translated essay: unity and clarity	2.73	.70		
Direct essay: vocabulary	2.18	.40	-.720	.480
Translated essay: vocabulary	2.32	.78		
Direct essay: form	2.09	.61	-.680	.504
Translated essay: form	2.23	.75		
Direct essay: final grade	2.50	.60	.491	.628
Translated essay: final grade	2.59	.73		

Although the difference in the grades of weaker students is not significant, translated writing's mean value is higher in all aspects.

3.4.3. Analysis of the Questionnaires

The ten questions about students' attitudes and the writing process were analysed and the answers in open-ended questions were categorised. In one of the questions, students were asked to report whether they turned to their L1 when they were writing directly in L2 and if they did, why. Out of the 43 participants, 31 said that they were thinking in Croatian while writing in English (25 said yes, six said sometimes), and twelve students said they were not. Students were asked to explain further, if they can, why they turned to their L1 when they were writing directly. 21 students reported that they were thinking in English because it was easier or more natural to think of and organize ideas, three students said they turned to L1 when they wanted to express a more complicated sentence or idea, and one student reported that she turned to L1 when she ran out of ideas. Additionally, twelve students who reported that they were not thinking in English were in fact stronger students so overall, out of the 21 stronger students; more than a half of them (57%) reported that they were not thinking in Croatian.

In the rest of the questions, students reported on their attitudes towards the writing modes. Students were asked whether they find it easy to write in English and 31 reported that they do. When specifically asked which of the writing modes is easier, 18 said that direct writing is easier, while 17 reported that translated writing is easier. The rest (8 students) had trouble deciding, and some of them even said that they did not see much of a difference. The students' answers were also analysed in terms of stronger and weaker groups. Only six out of 21 stronger students preferred translation. On the other hand, half of the weaker students (11) said that they found translation easier, and only five said that they think direct writing is easier. The rest of the weaker students could not decide or gave vague answers. Furthermore, students reported what problems or disadvantages they experienced while writing in direct and translated writing.

As for direct writing, students reported that they mostly had problems with finding right words to express ideas and using correct grammar. A few also mentioned having problems with organizing their ideas in a clear way, getting ideas to write on, and 3 said they had problems using complex grammatical structures. 10 students said they had absolutely no problems with direct writing. Table 3 shows how many times students selected each option. Students could circle multiple problems or report that they had no problems.

Table 4: Students' problems when writing directly in L2

Students' problems	Number of reports
Finding the right words to express my ideas	20
Using the correct grammar	15
Coming up with ideas	5
Organizing my ideas in a clear way	5
Using complex grammar	3

In open-ended questions, students could elaborate if and how they think direct writing can help in learning the L2. They were then asked to write down some advanteges and disadvanteges of direct writing, if they thought there were any. Most of the students (33) reported that writing directly in English helps them learn the language, and seven said that it does not, while the rest said that they are not sure. Table 4 shows the answers selected by students when asked how direct writing helps them in learning English. The first column is the answer and the second column is the number of times the answer was written by students.

Table 5: The ways in which direct writing helps students with learning English

The answers provided by the students	Number of reports
I am thinking in English	11
It helps me in general to learn all the aspects of language	6
I am developing/broadening my vocabulary and grammar	5
I learn by writing down the language	4
I am thinking about the words and the language itself	4
It helps me remember the language I used better	3
I use English phrases and write in the spirit of language	3

As for the advantages and disadvantages of the direct writing mode, 36 students said that they believed direct writing mode has its advantages and only one student said there were no advantages. The rest did not know or were not sure. Also, 27 students said that direct writing mode has its disadvantages, five students said there were none and the rest were on the fence about their answer. The tables below (6 and 7) show the advantages and disadvantages provided by the students and the number of times each advantage and disadvantage was reported. Biggest advantage of direct writing was that it is less time consuming, while the biggest disadvantage was that it is harder to think of the words in English.

Table 6: Advantages of direct writing as reported by students

Advantages	Number of reports
It is less time consuming	17
It encourages thinking in English	12
The sentence-structure is better	4
It is easier to find appropriate words	1
The overall text is of better quality	1
It helps make writing in English a habit	1

Table 7: Disadvantages of direct writing as reported by students

Disadvantage	Number of reports
It is harder to think of the words in English	7
There is less time for revision	5
It is harder to think of ideas	4

Overall, the quality of the essay is worse	2
There are more grammatical errors	2
It is harder to express thoughts in detail	1

When asked to write down what problems they had with translated writing, students reported that they predominately had problems with finding appropriate equivalents in English (26 students). The next biggest problem was with finding appropriate grammatical structures, and a few mentioned that they were mostly worried about finishing the translation on time. Only one student said that he/she had no problem with translation task. Table 7 shows how many students listed each problem.

Table 8: Students' problems when writing with translation

Students' problems	Number of students
Finding equivalent words in English	26
Finding equivalent grammatical structures	12
Finishing the translation in time	4

When asked whether they think translated writing can help them learn English better, most students said that it can (33 students), five students said that is cannot, four reported that they are not sure and one student said that it is the same as direct writing. When asked how it helps them two thirds of students (21) said that it helps them learn the vocabulary better, five students said that it improves their grammar while the other seven students did not provide further explanation on how it helps them.

Students also listed some advantages and disadvantages of translated writing mode. Seven students said that there were no advantages to translated writing mode, and 3 said that there were no disadvantages. Tables 9 and 10 show advantages and disadvantages of translated writing mode as reported by students and the number of times the advantage/disadvantage was reported.

Table 9: Advantages of translated writing as reported by students

Advantage	Number of reports
The writing process easier	7
Practicing translation	7
Easier to find ideas	6

Overall quality of the essay is better	2
Opportunity for revision while translating	2
Thinking about the subject more deeply	1
Less grammatical errors	1
Better choice of words	1

Table 10: Disadvantages of translated writing as reported by students

Disadvantage	Number of reports
It is time-consuming	21
It is hard to find the right words	5
It is hard to organise sentences	2

Finally, students reported whether they think translated writing is better, compared to direct writing. 40% of the students said that translated writing was better, 42% said that it was not, 9% said it was the same, and the rest said they were not sure (9%).

4. Discussion

The results of the final essay grades for translated and direct writing did not imply that one is significantly better than the other. This finding does not, at first, confirm results of any previous studies. However, stronger students seem to have benefited more from the direct writing mode. Stronger students performed better in terms of style (form and vocabulary) and scored better in the overall final grade when they were writing directly in L2. As Sasaki and Hirose (1996) showed in their model of EFL writing, L2 writing proficiency plays a big role in L2 writing process. Students who are more proficient typically know which strategies they need to use in order to develop good texts in English. Translation is a strategy that they do not often use since they are probably more confident in their language abilities, and more competent to produce a satisfying L2 text. It could be that translation impacts their fluency, which is why their style was better in direct writing. Better performance in vocabulary usage for these students might be a result of inability to find the appropriate words while translating, as was expressed by some students in the post-writing questionnaire. Since no dictionaries were allowed, the students could not find equivalents for L1 vocabulary that they used while writing in translated mode (Lifang, 2008). That the stronger students would not benefit from translation was also reported by Ismail and Alsheikh (2012), whose participants were at high-proficiency level. Stronger students also scored better in terms of form, which could be explained by their already sufficient knowledge of how to compose their essays in L2. As for weaker students, although there were no statistically significant differences between the subcomponents and the overall grade, the mean value for all subcomponents was greater in translated writing. This implies that less proficient students did benefit from translation, like some pervious research showed (Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992; Lifang 2008).

As for the fact that neither strong nor weak upper-intermediate level students benefited from translation in a significant way, it is important to remember that the ability to translate is a special skill and "people who speak a foreign language well are not necessarily those who translate most effectively, although there is a correlation between knowledge of the foreign language and the capacity to translate (…) The fact remains that ability to translate shows wide differences with ability to speak, understand, read, and write" (Lado, 1961:32, as cited in Smith, 1994). None of the students are used to writing an L1 draft and then translating it in L2 in the classroom context, which is where most of their essay writing occurs. Knowing how to translate is a skill (Dujmović, 2006) and, as their teacher noted, that skill is not taught enough in their EFL

classroom. It might be useful to include translation tasks in the curriculum so that the students could practice translation more.

The fact that 72% of students reported that they turned to their L1 while writing directly in L2 confirms what some previous research found (Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2000; Wang and Wen, 2002; Woodall, 2002; Lifang, 2008; van Weijen, et al., 2009; Fujii, 2012). What this implies is that most L2 students find it easier to think of what they want to say in their L1 and then conduct a mental translation in order to express those ideas in L2. As Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2000) noted, it seems that the direct writing is not as direct as it should be. Students reported that they turned to their L1 mostly because it felt more natural. For example, one student answered that "it is easier to express myself and my thoughts in Croatian and after that it is not a problem to switch to English". Many students said that it was easier to mentally switch or mentally translate from L1 to L2, but found translating the draft in the first writing task difficult. This is probably because students do not feel so much pressure when they simply transcribe their thoughts from L1 into L2 because they are more fluid and can be changed more easily. When writing down an L1 draft, the students might feel like they need to conduct a word-by-word translation.

As for the attitudes of students towards direct and translated writing tasks, it is not surprising that the preferences are divided since overall the students seemed to perform similarly in both writing modes. Direct writing, as reported by students, was less time consuming and encouraged thinking in L2 which would imply that students see their mental usage of L1 as something negative. The reason for their disliking of the L1 mental usage might be because the ability to easily think in L2 is usually considered a characteristic of a more proficient L2 learner. As for the fact that it is less time consuming, students were given more or less equal amount of time for both writing tasks but a number of students finished a few minutes earlier when they were writing directly. It could be that the students used their time for revision just to read their essay one more time or, as Silva (1992) warned, to focus only on grammatical and lexical problems. The big advantage of translation, as reported by some students was that it served as revision. As one student wrote: "The advantage of direct writing is that I was finished sooner, and the disadvantage is that we cannot correct the mistakes unlike when we are translating, where we can see our mistakes from the L1 draft and correct them in the process"

Students reported that the biggest problem with translation was that it was time-consuming. As for direct writing, as seen in table 4, some students said that it was hard to think of words or ideas in English and others said that there was less revision. One student said: "The advantage is that in direct writing I am encouraged to think in English and disadvantages are that the process is slower and it is harder to transcribe my thoughts into the text." For this reason, many authors

advocate some use of L1 in the L2 writing process. In the future, students should be taught how to effectively put down their ideas in L1 and then translate them. Of course, it is first necessary to see if this is what students want since every group of learners is different.

Both weak and strong students found translated writing to be very useful when learning English, especially for vocabulary acquisition, which implies that they are either used to learning vocabulary through translation or it suits them the best. As reported, 40% of students thought that translated writing is easier, compared to 42% who found direct writing easier. Some students answered vaguely or in a general sense. For example, one student wrote: "If you are proficient, then it is easier to write directly, but if you are a weaker student then it is easier to write down a draft in Croatian first". Although students said that translation was more time consuming, and a minority of students got a better final grade when translating, it seems that many students appreciate the concept of writing down an L1 draft because it helps them in one way or another. Still, almost the same amount of students found direct writing to be easier, so its benefits should not be forgotten, especially when it comes to stronger students. The questionnaire differentiated between words "better" and "easier" and asked students to report which writing mode was better and which easier. In the end, 40% of the students decided that translation was better, and 42% that it was the direct writing that is the better writing mode. This was surprising to the researcher, since the students are at an upper-intermediate level and are soon going to be writing their Matura essays in English. Not a small number of students would like to, it seems, be able to write down an L1 draft when writing short essays. This finding implies that many students need both L1 and L2 at disposal when they are writing in L2. The fact that a big number of students see translation as better or easier could be beneficial to know for many teachers of EFL so that they could understand how their students write and what they need to feel most comfortable. Only when students feel confident will they be able to express their ideas in the most coherent and clear way.

Finally, it is important to stress that though the topics were chosen because they seem universal and thought provoking, they could have played a role in the outcome, as it is with all essay topics. Future research could provide more topics for students to choose from.

5. Conclusion

The results of this research show there are no significant differences between translated and direct writing with upper-intermediate students of EFL. Still, group results reveal that stronger students perform better when writing directly in terms of vocabulary usage, form, and the overall grade. This result was confirmed by the fact that majority of the stronger students prefer direct writing and do not have to use their L1 mentally when writing in L2. This research also shows that weaker students could benefit from translation, since their mean value was a little higher in all graded components. Unsurprisingly, half of the weaker students find translated writing better and easier.

Questionnaires revealed that upper-intermediate EFL writers use both L1 and L2 in the L2 writing process. Students use L1 when writing directly because it feels more natural and helps them organise and come up with ideas. Although most students find L2 writing easy, in both translated and direct writing students struggle with vocabulary. Another conclusion brought by this research is that translation is more time-consuming and it is difficult to find equivalent words in English. In the end, the most important conclusion of present study is that students find both direct and translated writing to be useful when learning English. Direct writing pushes students to think in English, a native-like habit, while translated writing makes the whole writing process easier and smoother. Therefore, both direct and translated writing tasks can be implemented in the EFL classroom, and more importantly, a learner can see for himself/herself which writing mode leads to better quality of their essays.

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Appendix 1

1. Post-writing Questionnaire (source: Lifang (2008))

Ova anketa služi samo u svrhu istraživanja. Sve informacije će biti zaštićene. Puno hvala na uloženom vremenu.

Ime: _____

Spol: M Ž

Dob: _____

Koliko godina formalno učiš engleski jezik: _____

Kako bi ocijenio/la svoju kompetentnost korištenja Engleskog jezika?

(A) Odlična (B) Vrlo dobra (C) Dobra (D) Prihvatljiva (E) Slaba

DIREKTNO i PREVOĐENO pisanje kratkog eseja

Direktno pisanje

1. Osjećaš li da ti je lako pisati direktno na engleskom jeziku?

Da) Ne)

2. Kada si pisao/la direktno na engleskom jeziku, imao/la si problema s:

(A) Smišljanjem ideja

(B) Organiziranjem ideja na jasan način

(C) Pronalaženjem pravih riječi kako bi izrazio/la svoje ideje

(D) Upotrebom točne gramatike

(E) Korištenjem kompleksnih gramatičkih struktura

(F) Nisam imao/la problema s direktnim pisanjem na engleskom jeziku

3. Jesi li razmišljao/la na hrvatskom dok si pisao direktno na engleskom jeziku? Ako jesi, molim te navedi razloge zašto si se okrenuo hrvatskom jeziku.

_____
_____

4. Misliš li da ti direktno pisanje na engleskom jeziku pomaže naučiti jezik? Ako da, molim te pojasni kako ti točno pomaže?

_____
_____

5. Koje su bili prednosti, a koji nedostaci direktnog pisanja na engleskom jeziku?

_____
_____

Prevođeno pisanje

6. U usporedbi s direktnim pisanjem, misliš li da ti je laške pisati prevođenjem?

_____

7. Kada sam prevodio/la s hrvatskog na engleski, imao/la sam problema s:

(A) Pronalaženjem primjerenih ekvivalentnih riječi na engleskom jeziku

(B) Pronalaženjem primjerenih engleskih gramatičkih rečeničnih struktura

(C) Dovršavanjem prevođenja u zadanom vremenskom roku

(D) Nisam imao problema

8. Misliš li da ti prevođenje pomaže naučiti/poboljšati engleski jezik te pisanje na engleskom? Kako misliš da ti može pomoći?

_____
_____

9. Koje su bile prednosti, a koji nedostaci pisanja prvo na hrvatskom pa potom prevođenja na engleski jezik?

_____
_____

10. U usporedbi s direktnim pisanjem, misliš li da je prevođeno pisanje bolje ili gore? Zašto?

_____
_____

Appendix 2

Grading scale (source: Kobayashi and Rinnert (1992))

1) Content

Specifics: vivid examples, supporting details (1-5)

Developed Idea: explanation or elaboration of the main idea (1-5)

2) Organization

Logical sequencing: ideas following logically within paragraphs (1-5)

Unity and clarity: ideas throughout paper relating to main point;
ideas easy to understand (1-5)

3) Style

Vocabulary: sophisticated range, variety of appropriate register (1-5)

Form: variety of sentence beginnings, structure of sentences correct (1-5)