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The First Language vs. the Foreign Language: A Study

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Putting pen to paper when you don't speak the language is a challenge. When writing in a foreign language, Esther Odilia Breuer employs a boxing analogy to depict the challenging task of balancing cognitive processes and avoiding the "punches" of the first language (L1) to the foreign language (L2), which requires the writer's training, flexibility, and endurance (FL). The fight between the L1 and FL for supremacy is a major topic of Breuer's PhD dissertation, which Peter Lag has recently published as a book in the Text production and Medium series (Eds. Eva-Maria Jakobs and Dagmar Knorr). "when, how, and in which areas the battle between the L1 and the FL takes place, which methods [writers] use in order to shield themselves from the 'attacks' of the L1, and when they fail and have to take a strike" (First language against foreign language) (Chapter 1, p. 4). Writing in FL has been shown to have three distinct problems: (1) fluidity, (2) mistakes, and (3) revision, all of which Breuer examines in great length in comparison to writing in L1. Breuer also looks at the connections between these characteristics. Node switches, code switches, content, type, and other faults are used by Breuer to classify and classify error and revision data in order to better comprehend L1-initiated "attacks" on FL (i.e., negative transfer from the L1 on the FL). As a theoretical framework, Breuer's Bilingual Tripartite Architecture (or Parallel Architecture) serves as a starting point for the classification system's categorization.

Six chapters are included in the book's total runtime. After a description of Breuer's Bilingual Tripartite Architecture in Chapter 2, she reviews the current literature on the qualities of L1 and FL writing that are relevant to her study in Chapter 3. To round things off, in Chapter 3 she discusses her research's potential next steps. There is an explanation of the study's design and data gathering and analysis procedures in Chapter 4. To conclude, Breuer triangulates the

main results in Chapters 5–7 by discussing the findings relating to productivity and fluency, as well as mistakes and revisions (Chapter 8).

a framework through which to analyse theoretical issues

"wholistic" multi-lingualism, according to Breuer's Bilingual Tripartite (or Parallel) Architecture, may be understood as a "completely competent speaker-hearer" who uses two or more languages either independently or in a blended fashion (Chapter 2, p. 23). The Bilingual Tripartite Architecture is based on Jackendoff's (monolingual) Tripartite Architecture and has three unique components (phonology, syntax and semantics). Unlike phonological structure, which is present in both the L1 and FL, syntactic structure is language-specific and so cannot be found in either the L1 or FL. When it comes to the structure of a notion or idea, the language in which it is presented has no bearing on it. According to this paradigm, none of the three structures is considered to be more important than the others. Instead, the structures work in tandem and are connected by two-way interfaces. For example, it is conceivable to identify interfaces not only between structures inside a single language (e.g., between the phonological structure of L1 and the syntactical structure of L1), but also between structures in two or more languages (e.g., between L1 phonology and FL phonology) (e.g., L1 phonological structure - FL syntactic structures). All other structures are tied to the conceptual structure that is not reliant on language. As opposed to Francis' (2004) Bilingual Tripartite Parallel Architecture, which treats the multilingual lexicon as two separate systems, the Multilingual Tripartite Architecture treats the bilingual lexicon as a single system. Activating this bilingual lexicon prior to the syntactical and phonological structures (as in Francis's model) is not required, but rather functioning as an interface between these structures. L1 and FL orthographic structures enable a more efficient quadripartite architecture to be built on top of the existing bipartite architecture.

A suitable phrase would be Breuer's Bilingual Tripartite Architecture, which is a dynamic system in which L1 and FL rules and objects are active at once and all language structures influence one another. With the help of this complex network, Breuer is able to describe and explain the L1 assaults on the FL (but also the influence of the FL on the L1). Because both the FL and the L1 are active at the same time in FL writing, there is rivalry between the linguistic structures for execution in the FL writing environment when using the FL interface.

Consequently, it is plausible that the L1 takes leadership and slams the FL with a deadly blow. 'Yesterday, I met the new decano [dean], and he was pretty simpático [friendly]' is an example of a code switch established as a result of the L1's influence on the FL. Node switches are faults that are not full code switches but that represent the usage of the erroneous interface, leading in a phonological, syntactic, or orthographic L1 structure being dominant in a FL utterance (or vice versa). A German-English bilingual speaker in an academic setting wrote this statement to explain how node-switching functions: "I laughed because the joke was amusing because" I said (p. 43). An English-based conceptual framework and phonological structure are both activated and executed via English. In contrast, because has triggered the syntactic requirements of the German counterpart 'weil', which requires the verb to be at the end of the subordinate phrase in formal written German. Syntactic node-switches are the most common kind, however node-switches may be found in a wide range of forms. There are node-switches that are phonological, orthographic and punctuational, syntactic, semantic, and genre specific. It is hypothesised that purposeful use of node-switches and code-switches results from a writer's failure to control or restrict L1 activation, as well as other conditions, such as a lack of FL proficiency and cognitive stress.

A framework for the study of methodology

Using the theoretical framework above, Breuer studies the writing processes of ten German students studying English philology (English language and literature) in order to understand and interpret their writing (enrolled on average for 7.6 semesters in higher education). All of the students were given the same due date for one basic essay (in Florida) and four academic essays (two in the L1 and two in the FL). Each student was also told to use a range of preparation strategies for their academic papers. These strategies included taking notes while writing one essay and freewriting in the other. These assignments included a SE (simple essay), L1N (German academic essay using the note-taking planning strategy), FLN (English academic essay using note-taking), L1F (German academic essay using the freewriting planning method), and FLF (freewriting planning technique) assignment (English academic essay using freewriting). Additionally, we discovered that a particular preparation technique might assist students lessen their reliance on their native language when it comes to writing in their second language.

Triangulation is used to obtain and analyse data, which is described as a method that incorporates many sources. Data was gathered by a mix of computer keyboard logging, questionnaires, and retrospective interviews. The data analysis process includes, among other things, a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative study of both process and product data. Breuer is particularly interested in three process data characteristics: productivity, fluency, and the frequency of revisions. The length of the finished text and the number of words and characters generated, as well as the amount of time spent on the task, the distribution of time across the writing processes, and a comparison of stopping and active writing time are all factors that contribute to productivity (if applicable). Specifically, bursts are studied in terms of their frequency and duration, with special emphasis devoted to the average number of words and characters per burst, as well as pause and review intervals and the location of burst endings. Among the most important aspects of the revision analysis are the types of revisions, the number of "double" revisions, and the distribution of revisions across writing processes, as well as P- and R-bursts and rewriting iterations. The revision count and the number of characters produced without revisions are also major considerations. The classification system of node-switches, code-switches, content, type, and other defects is used for both the revision analysis and the product analysis (i.e., the error analysis). The inaccuracies in the planning as well as the mistakes in the final texts are the subject of the error analysis (quantity, types of error, distribution of errors over error types).

Results

It is possible for Breuer to look at the conflict between L1 and FL writing from several angles because of the study's wide research design: (1) L1 versus FL writing; (2) note-taking vs freewriting planning inside and across the L1/FL (and vice versa). This gives her the ability to look at the link between process and product metrics from a variety of angles.

Both language and planning, according to Breuer's findings, seem to have an effect on output and fluency levels. Compared to the FL, productivity in the L1 was greater, leading to longer texts, higher output rates, and quicker processing speeds. The freewriting planning strategy seemed to boost productivity, however this impact was more pronounced in the L1 group than in the L2 group. No obvious link could be found between language and planning or the allocation of time across writing activities because of vast range of intra-individual

variability. Planned writing reduced burst frequency and increased burst duration, both of which were seen during freewriting. This suggests that preparation influenced fluency. We may conclude from this study that while people were taking notes, they were more likely to exhibit this pattern. Using simply burst length in the formulation process (and only when assessed in characters), fluency was influenced by language, with the L1 language having a greater impact on this. According to these findings, L1 speakers are more productive and fluent than those who speak other languages. No matter how effective it looks to be in both languages, the freewriting planning method isn't generally employed to help writers engage more with the text they're creating and avoid their processing slowing down. A more thorough editing process was found to be necessary as seen by the mistake analysis, which showed that the enhanced processing speed brought about by freewriting did not necessarily improve linguistic quality.

Performance flaws may emerge for a variety of reasons, two of which being language and planning. While the L1 academic essays had a larger number of mistakes than their FL counterparts, FL texts featured a smaller number of errors than L1 academic essays (see table). Even though the writers were writing in their own language, Breuer says this shows that the academic genre is still seen as a foreign language by the authors, even while they were in their L1 linguistic setting. The great majority of the faults were node-switches, signalling a negative transfer from the L1 to the FL, as seen by the sorts of mistakes caused in the FL plans and final texts. To a varying degree, the L1 influenced the FL plans and final texts and planning requirements. As a result, even while there were more mistakes in FL note-taking plans, this did not always have an effect on the formulation process. The authors' preferred writing styles in the L1 and FL (Mozartians against Beethovians, as proposed by Breuer) were shown to have an influence on the quality of their final texts, which might be attributed to their planning strategy. Freewriting had more mistakes than note-taking, including syntactic node changes, even if the planning techniques seemed to produce particular node switches. The reverse was true for the note-taking condition (e.g., genre node-switches). There are several ways in which the planning approaches interact with interfaces between the conceptual and phonological as well as orthographic and syntactic structures, according to Breuer's interpretation of these results.

Revision was shown to be impacted by both language and preparation, according to Breuer's research. However, it is important to note that the amount of time spent on final revision was very restricted in his experimentation. Revision rates were lower in the L1 (as judged by the amount of characters written) than in the FL, and greater in planning by note-taking than free writing. Results from a research found that the FL note-taking condition had the greatest percentage of final text modifications. Due to a lack of or decreased stimulation of the FL formulation process, increased L1 usage during planning, and difficulties in obtaining FL words throughout the formulation process, this may be the cause. A familiar monitoring strategy was used by FL participants, whereas L1 participants displayed more flexibility. A more significant impact on revision was shown in the FL than in the L1, where participants utilised monitoring techniques that they were more comfortable with, but in the L1, monitoring methods were more flexible. Revision and error analyses were undertaken concurrently in order to reveal the L1 and FL's fight. The participants showed to have difficulty discriminating between the effect of L1 and other factors when writing in the FL. However, apart from minor adjustments in orthographic node-switching, the majority of the changes that participants made to their FL plans and final texts concerned language-independent issues such as typos and content problems. The results suggest that participants were more able to recognise the effect of L1 on FL writing in the freewriting condition during planning than they were in the formalised condition during formulation and revision while developing and editing their replies,

In my opinion

Breuer has accomplished the tough challenge of turning his doctorate dissertation into a book with a narrative that is both simple to read and well organised. Before the results chapters begin, a creative summary shows the linkages between theoretical chapters and chapters pertaining to the actual study that was carried out in the lab. Even more so, these outcomes chapters begin and end with a short restatement of the hypotheses, which serves to further improve the text's cohesiveness.

The book is a treasure trove of important information that is well-written. Every aspect of the study's planning and execution is meticulously documented, including every choice made during the task design and every mistake and revision categorization system used. The data

analysis and reporting of findings are substantial, however they may be too complex for the publishing style that was selected. When discussing all types of errors and revisions, regardless matter how often they occur, a reader may lose focus on the most important findings. In addition, the use of just descriptive statistics inhibits a clear understanding of the impact of language and strategy on product and process metrics (due to the limited sample size). Analyses using non-parametric statistics might have yielded more information. It is possible that further study may enhance the methodological features, such as the reliability of coding mistakes and revisions. Breuer's study had the researcher check the mistakes and corrections oneself, although a panel of coders could be a better option for this kind of investigation.

As a translation researcher, I found this book to be an excellent introduction to the topic of writing-process research. Process execution or text quality differences are the focus of the vast bulk of existing research on L1 vs. FL writing. L1 and FL writing product and process measurements are only briefly discussed in a few research studies (e.g., Van Weijen, 2008). She keeps her promise, but at the same time introduces another aspect into the contrastive L1-FL process-product mix, which is the effect of planning.

It is also notable that this study provides systematic empirical evidence of when and in what form "L1 attacks" in FL writing occur, which is a first in the literature. Writing in a foreign language can be hindered by a lack of fluency in one's native language, as well as aided by it. Using an error and revision classification system he devised himself, Breuer, on the other hand, is able to make the "L1 attacks" in FL writing visible and comparable between assignments. Furthermore, according to the author, Breuer's Bilingual Tripartite Architecture appears to be a suitable model for attempting to understand how and why 'L1 attacks' occur. A more thorough examination of the model's actual strengths and weaknesses could have been accomplished through a systematic examination of how the study's findings support and contradict the premises on which the model and its components are based. In spite of this, First Language versus Foreign Language is a thought-provoking work that contains a wealth of topics that could be explored further in writing didactics and possible L1-FL writing studies in the future. The L1 has a reputation for throwing punches when it comes to

translating into other languages, including French and Spanish, so I'd recommend it to both writing teachers and researchers.

References

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