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SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Series Editor: David Singleton

Writing in Foreign Language Contexts

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Rosa M. Manchón

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- Rinnert, C. and Kobayashi, H. (2007) L1 and L2 pre-university writing experience: What effects on novice Japanese EFL writers? *Hiroshima Journal of International Studies* (Faculty of International Studies, Hiroshima City University) 13, 65–92.
- Roca de Larios, J. and Murphy, L. (2001) Some steps towards a socio-cognitive interpretation of second language composition processes. In R.M. Manchón (ed.) *Writing in the L2 classroom. Issues in Research and Pedagogy*. Special issue of *International Journal of English Studies* 1 (2), 25–46.
- Roca de Larios, J., Murphy, L. and Marín, J. (2002) A critical examination of L2 writing process research. In S. Ransdell and M. Barbier (eds) *New Directions for Research in L2 Writing* (pp. 11–47). Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic.
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- Shi, L. (2003) Writing in two cultures: Chinese professors return from the West. *The Canadian Language Review* 59 (3), 369–391.
- Shi, L. and Beckett, G.H. (2002) Japanese exchange students' writing experiences in a Canadian university. *TESL Canada Journal* 20 (1), 38–56.
- Singley, M.K. and Anderson, J.R. (1989) *The Transfer of Cognitive Skill*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
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Chapter 2

Changes in English as a Foreign Language Students' Writing Over 3.5 years: A Sociocognitive Account

MIYUKI SASAKI

Introduction

In this chapter, I present an empirical longitudinal study of 22 foreign language (FL) writers, with a special focus on the dynamics of their second language (L2) writing ability and motivation over 3.5 years. The study is a follow-up of another recent longitudinal study (Sasaki, 2004), and it was also motivated by the findings of five other studies (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Sasaki, 2000, 2002, 2007) that I have conducted over the past 15 years. In line with the other contributions in Part 1, I will first present a synthesis of these studies, which will serve as the contextualization for the present study.

The six studies (including Sasaki, 2004) can be categorized according to their purpose, theoretical framework, data type and empirical approach (Table 2.1). The first four studies are divided into two pairs in that the earlier ones in each pair (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Sasaki, 2000) were exploratory with smaller sample sizes and more research targets analyzed, and the later ones (Hirose & Sasaki, 1996; Sasaki, 2002) were confirmatory, statistically testing hypotheses obtained on the basis of the previous exploratory studies. In the first pair, Keiko Hirose and I examined explanatory factors for Japanese learners' English writing ability. In Hirose and Sasaki (1994), L2 proficiency and first language (L1) writing ability significantly explained 74.5% of the 19 Japanese students' L2 composition score variance. In Sasaki and Hirose (1996), in addition to L2 proficiency (52%) and L1 writing ability (18%), L2 writing meta-knowledge significantly explained 11% of the L2 composition score variance. We also found that good L2 writers were different from poor

Table 2.1 Relationships among six studies

<i>The target of analysis</i>	<i>Theoretical framework</i>	<i>Data type used</i>	<i>Exploratory</i>	<i>Confirmatory</i>
Explanatory factors for the quality of L2 writing	Psychometric (causal-comparative)	Cross-sectional (<i>etic</i>)	Hirose and Sasaki (1994)	Sasaki and Hirose (1996)
L2 writing processes	Cognitive models of L1 writing	Cross-sectional/longitudinal (<i>etic</i>)	Sasaki (2000)	Sasaki (2002)
Changes in L2 writing behavior and motivation	Cognitive models of L1 writing	Longitudinal (<i>etic</i> + <i>emic</i>)	Sasaki (2002)	
Effect of study-abroad experiences	Cognitive models of L1 writing	Longitudinal (<i>etic</i> + <i>emic</i>)	Sasaki (2007)	

writers in terms of L2 writing strategy use, previous L2 writing experiences and L2 writing confidence.

After we conducted these two studies examining *what* factors determined the quality of Japanese students' L2 writing, I became interested in *how* the end-product of such writing was actually achieved. Thus, in Sasaki (2000) and (2002), the second pair of the studies in Table 2.1, I investigated the English writing processes among three different pairs of Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) writers: experts versus novices; more- versus less-skilled student writers; and novice writers before and after two semesters of writing instruction. For the theoretical framework, I drew on studies that had originally been employed for building 'cognitive models of L1 writing' (Manchón *et al.*, 2007) both in Japanese (Anzai & Uchida, 1981) and in English (e.g. Flower & Hayes, 1981), and later in L2 (e.g. Cumming, 1989). In Sasaki (2000) and (2002), I also added a longitudinal design comparing the same novice writers before and after two semesters of L2 writing instruction in order to examine how such instruction would affect the same participants' L2 writing processes. In Sasaki (2000), the eight novice writers did not become either better or more fluent in L2 writing over two semesters, but

in Sasaki (2002), another 22 participants did become significantly better if not more fluent. The results of Sasaki (2002) also revealed that the experts paid significantly more attention to rhetorical refining, and less attention to local planning than the novices, and that the novices paid significantly less attention to local planning at the end of the second semester.

In these four previous studies, I dealt mainly with the cognitive aspects of L2 writing product/processes from an *etic* perspective. It was not until Sasaki (2004) that I became interested in the participants' *emic* perspective as well as possible effects of external factors on their L2 writing ability and its development. After I conducted Sasaki (2002), I was able to continue to observe 11 out of the 22 participants for the following 2.5 years (i.e. for 3.5 years including the first year in Sasaki [2002]). In Sasaki (2004), I thus reported these participants' changes over 3.5 years in terms of L2 proficiency, L2 writing quality/fluency, the use of L2 writing strategies and confidence in L2 writing. Because six (the English as a second language [ESL] students) of the 11 participants chose to spend some time in English-speaking environments during the observation period, I could also examine the effects of these experiences. The scarcity of such longitudinal studies and the small sample size made the study exploratory in nature. As mentioned above, at the end of my 3.5-year observation period, I decided to ask each participant about their own views of their changes in these different variables over the period because, having looked at *what* and *how* these students learned to write in L2, I became interested in exploring *why* they changed the way they did.

The results of Sasaki (2004) revealed that most participants improved their L2 writing quality, fluency and confidence over 3.5 years. The students who remained in Japan (the EFL students) attributed their improvement mainly to the English classes they took at the Japanese university. In contrast, the ESL students explained that their overseas experiences made the greatest impact on their L2 writing ability. Furthermore, it was only the students who went abroad that became more motivated to write better compositions, and they all attributed such motivation increase to their overseas stay.

Because the factor of study-abroad (SA) experiences was so influential on the participants' L2 writing development in Sasaki (2004), I did a follow-up study (Sasaki, 2007) to confirm these findings. I thus compared the L2 writing ability/fluency and the use of L2 writing strategies of seven Japanese university students (the SA group) who spent four to nine months in English-speaking countries with six students (the at-home [AH] group) who remained in Japan over one year that covered all the

SA students' overseas stay, but not extending too long after that. The results showed that only the SA group improved their L2 writing ability, although both groups improved their general L2 proficiency. In terms of motivation, as with the ESL students in Sasaki (2004), only the SA students became more motivated to make efforts to write better L2 compositions. For this study, I also included students' interviews and reports representing their *emic* perspective. Such data revealed that the AH students attributed the deterioration in their L2 writing ability to the extensive job-hunting activities they had been engaged in over the one year, and that the SA students again mainly credited their L2 writing improvement to their overseas experiences. These results confirmed the importance of examining the participants' cognitive development as situated in their sociocultural environments. At this point, as a researcher, I redirected myself toward a larger theoretical framework than the 'main-stream' (Thorne, 2005: 393) exclusively cognitivist research perspective.

The Present Study

In the present study, using a new set of data, I therefore examined both the cognitive and social aspects of the participants' changes in L2 writing ability and motivation, the two variables that played important roles in my previous studies as explained above. Because many of the participants spent some time in L2 speaking environments during the 3.5-year observation period, and because these experiences had varying degrees of impact on their L2 writing ability development and motivation according to the length of their overseas stays, the study also investigated the effects of different lengths of such SA experiences. Unlike in Sasaki (2004) where the social aspects were by-products of its research design, in the present study, I adopted a sociocognitive design, which guided me in investigating the participants' L2 writing development in a more socially situated manner. This 'socio-cognitive' orientation corresponds to Riazi's (1997: 110) 'social-cognitive perspective' in its belief that the cognitive aspects of L2 writing are better explained when considered with the social situations that the learners interact with.

Below are brief summaries of the results of previous studies that have targeted the three relevant factors for the present study: L2 writing ability development, L2 writing motivation, and effects of SA experiences on L2 writing.

Influential factors for L2 writing ability development

Researchers have investigated potentially influential factors for L2 writing development both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. Cross-sectionally, the construct of L2 writing ability has usually been measured by L2 writing quality. Researchers to date have found that the quality of L2 writing tends to be high if the writers have high L2 proficiency (e.g. Pennington & So, 1993) and/or high L1 writing ability (e.g. Cumming, 1989), if they use good writers' strategies (e.g. 'planning' in Jones & Tetroe, 1987), if they possess a sufficient amount of metaknowledge (e.g. Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2001) and/or if they have practiced L2 writing sufficiently (e.g. Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). The findings of these cross-sectional studies are insightful, but we cannot assume any causal relationship between these factors and the participants' L2 writing ability because their characteristics were examined synchronically with L2 writing quality. In other words, they might have just co-occurred with good L2 writing.

In contrast, longitudinal studies, although scarce in number, can allow us to establish more confidently a causal relationship between various factors and L2 writing development (Asher, 1983). This is especially true when students are receiving L2 writing instruction while studies are being conducted. In Sasaki (2002), for example, participants significantly improved their L2 composition scores while taking a freshman composition class over two semesters. I thus speculated that such instruction probably brought about the students' L2 writing development. Furthermore, when I had access to the participants' own views, I became even more confident in the effects of the instruction (Sasaki, 2004, 2007). In these studies, students who went abroad added that having written much and often in their overseas classes was also useful. These accounts confirm the results of cross-sectional studies (e.g. Sasaki & Hirose, 1996) suggesting that L2 writing practice and metaknowledge can influence L2 writing ability development.

L2 writing motivation

In the 1970s, Robert Gardner and his colleagues initiated modern L2 motivation studies in Canada. Their models usually included factors affecting L2 acquisition, such as attitude and anxiety, in addition to (sometimes different types of) motivation (e.g. Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Their studies were typically psychometric, utilizing correlations among scores for these variables, and the target variable tended to be general L2 proficiency. The fact that the research target was general L2

proficiency remained true even after the 1990s when some other constructs such as self-confidence (e.g. Clément *et al.*, 1994) started to be introduced into L2 motivation research from the fields of education and psychology, and even after qualitative studies started to investigate how learners' motivational changes interacted with their sociocultural environments over time (e.g. Ushioda, 2001).

The particular construct of L2 writing motivation was thus rarely investigated until the beginning of 2000 when Alister Cumming and his colleagues started a series of inquiries into the nature and development of L2 writing goals and motivation. Their participants were all ESL students in university settings in Canada. Because the studies were conducted after the field of L2 motivation research had been challenged to include the perspective of 'context and time' (Dörnyei, 2001: 47), Cumming and his colleagues responded to this challenge by employing longitudinal and situated data. Yang *et al.* (2004), for example, provided a microlevel detailed analysis of six ESL students' L2 motivational changes over the course of one ESL program. As the means of explaining the qualitative changes in the participants' L2 writing motivation, Yang *et al.* (2004) used Engeström's (1987) expanded activity system, believing that 'individual students are active, responsive agents with their own individual goals, orientations, values, beliefs, and histories' (Yang *et al.*, 2004: 14). In addition to this activity theory perspective, Cumming (2006: ix) employed goal theory from the field of psychology for its 'multiple theoretical frames' in seven collaborative studies focusing on both students' and their teachers' goals for learning and teaching L2 writing. Cumming's (2006) results are insightful, showing how L2 students'/teachers' motivation constantly interacted with environmental factors. And yet, from the perspective of FL writing research, investigation of students' goals for learning L2 writing may not be applicable because FL students do not always have to set goals to survive in their L2 learning situations. However, no study to date has been conducted to investigate such general L2 writing motivation in an FL setting.

Effects of study-abroad experiences

Research on the effects of SA experiences has become increasingly popular, especially during the past two decades. Researchers have discovered that (1) compared with their AH counterparts, SA students made greater improvement in their L2 speaking ability (e.g. Lafford, 2004), L2 listening ability (e.g. Allen, 2002), L2 reading ability (e.g. Dewey, 2004) and in their sociolinguistic use of L2 (e.g. Barron, 2006); (2) the

sociocultural environments of the L2 community (e.g. how they were treated) played an important role for such changes (e.g. Churchill, 2006); and (3) there were great individual differences in terms of these changes (e.g. Isabelli-García, 2006).

Despite these findings, there are many other aspects of SA experiences that still need further investigation. For example, compared with speaking, listening and reading skills, very few studies have investigated the effects of SA experiences on L2 writing skills (Churchill & Dufon, 2006). Another area that remains to be studied and is also relevant to the present study is motivation. Very few studies have examined the effects of overseas stay on L2 learning motivation. When they were investigated at all, the findings were mixed, with SA experiences working positively (e.g. Simões, 1996) or negatively (e.g. Allen, 2002). Furthermore, no study to date has examined how the particular variable of L2 writing motivation might be affected by SA experiences. A third area that needs further studies concerns the effects of the length of stay overseas. Very few studies have been conducted to examine such effects on any variable of skill and knowledge. Although researchers admit that longer stays tend to produce better results, 'the question of how long is needed to make significant gains in specific skills remains unanswered' (Churchill & Dufon, 2006: 23). Lastly, practically no study has reported long-term effects (e.g. six months after) of SA experiences on any skill and knowledge.

Informed and motivated by the results of these previous studies as well as my own studies described in the introductory section, I undertook the present study with the following four questions in mind:

- (1) How does the students' L2 writing ability change over 3.5 years?
- (2) How does their L2 writing motivation change over 3.5 years?
- (3) How do their motivational changes interact with changes in their L2 writing ability?
- (4) Do the different lengths of the students' SA experiences have differential impacts on their L2 writing ability and motivational changes?

Method

Participants

At the beginning of the present study, the 22 participants were all 18-year-old university freshmen, majoring in British and American studies at the same university in Japan. They had studied English for six years

by the time the study began. They had received little L2 writing instruction while at high school. By the time they graduated from the university, however, they had taken at least one ESL class where they obtained some knowledge about how to prepare texts for what Johns (1997: 46) calls 'the pedagogical genres', such as 'the essay examination responses, the term paper, or the pedagogical summary'. Their mean score ($M = 122.82$ for a maximum of 200, $SD = 17.01$) for an argumentative composition was not significantly different from that ($M = 134.55$, $SD = 17.43$) of the participants of Sasaki (2004) when they were freshmen ($t(31) = 1.85$, $p = 0.07$). They all received compensation for participating in this study.

Between their sophomore and senior years, 17 of the 22 students participated in SA programs provided by the university, spending different lengths of time in Canada, the USA or in New Zealand. All participants were subsequently divided into four groups according to the length of their overseas stay. The SA-2 group ($n = 6$) participated in two-month SA programs, the SA-4 group ($n = 3$) in four-month SA programs, the SA-8/11 group ($n = 8$) in eight- to eleven-month SA programs and the AH group ($n = 5$) remained in Japan during my 3.5-year observation period. In addition to such length differences, the three SA programs also differed in prior requirements: only five applicants (out of a total of 150 students) with the top institutional Test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) scores were allowed to attend the 8/11 SA program, and only the next 10 best were allowed to attend the SA-4 programs, but there was no such requirement for the SA-2 programs. Consequently, most SA-4 and SA-8/11 students studied hard to obtain high TOEFL scores before going abroad. In this sense, these four groups might have been motivationally different from the very beginning of their university life. However, when they were freshmen, neither their general English proficiency (measured by the sum of Listening and Structure section scores of *Comprehensive English Language Test*; see Harris and Palmer [1986]; $F(3, 18) = 1.15$ for a maximum of 200) nor their English writing ability (see the Results and Discussion section) was significantly different.

Table 2.2 presents the mean hours of ESL and regular-subject classes the participants took overseas and in Japan. The SA-2 students only took ESL classes whereas the SA-4 and SA-8/11 students took both ESL and regular-subject classes. At the Japanese university, the AH students generally took more English classes than the SA students simply because they were in Japan longer. The number of English classes these four groups took at the Japanese university drastically decreased for their

Table 2.2 Four different groups' English-related educational experiences over the four university years

Group	Mean class hours per week when abroad	Mean English class hours per week when in Japan
At-home ($n = 5$)	None	Freshman: 9
		Sophomore: 6.5
		Junior: 6.6
		Senior: 0.2
SA-2 ($n = 6$)	ESL: 25.4	Freshman: 9
		Sophomore: 5.1
		Junior: 3.8
		Senior: 1.5
SA-4 ($n = 3$)	ESL: 12.4 Regular subject: 5.7	Freshman: 8.9
		Sophomore: 4.8
		Junior: 6.6
		Senior: 1.9
SA-8/11 ($n = 8$)	ESL: 10.9 Regular subject: 6.2	Freshman: 9
		Sophomore: 4.1
		Junior: 4.5
		Senior: 0.4

senior year because, like many other university students in Japan, they were busy job-hunting during that year (see Sasaki, 2007).

Data

As shown in Table 2.3, I collected L2 writing and motivation data at four different points: in the first month of the participants' freshman year (pre-freshman period), and the third month of their sophomore, junior and senior years (mid-sophomore, mid-junior, mid-senior periods). In addition, in the eighth month of their senior year (post-senior period), I interviewed them again to collect their own accounts of changes in their L2 writing ability and motivation.

Table 2.3 Types of data collected at different periods of observation

Type of data collected (month, year)	Pre-freshman (month 1, year 1)	Mid-sophomore (month 4, year 2)	Mid-junior (month 4, year 3)	Mid-senior (month 4, year 4)	Post-senior (month 9, year 4)
L2 writing score	x	x	x	x	
Student interviews about L2 classes and motivation	x	x	x	x	
Student interview about changes in L2 writing ability and motivation					x

Composition scores

The participants wrote an argumentative composition on a randomly selected topic from among seven prompts concerning such issues as living in a city or in the country, or abolishing school uniforms (see Sasaki [2004] and the Appendix). The prompts were selected in such a way that the participants wrote about different topics on four different occasions, and that similar ratios of the participants in the four groups addressed the same topics. No participant wrote about the same topic twice.

Two EFL writing specialists scored all the compositions, following Jacobs *et al.*'s (1981) English Composition Profile (an analytical rating scale for EFL compositions involving five evaluation criteria: content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics). The raters had not been informed of the purposes of the present study, when each composition had been written or from which participant group it came. The inter-rater correlation (Pearson correlation coefficient) for the content subscore was 0.88; the organization subscore, 0.83; the vocabulary subscore, 0.75; the language use subscore, 0.80; the mechanics subscore, 0.48 (probably caused by the very narrow range of 1 to 5); and the total score, 0.91. I judged that these correlations were acceptable for the study.

Interviews about L2 writing strategies, L2 classes and motivation given after each composition session

After the participants wrote the compositions described above, I interviewed them about the L2 writing strategies they used for the compositions they had just written (see Sasaki, 2007), the English classes they had taken before and on which aspect of English writing they wanted to improve, if any. The sessions lasted about 60 minutes.

Post-senior interviews on changes in L2 writing ability and motivation

Four months after the participants wrote their mid-senior compositions, I interviewed them individually to collect accounts of their changes between their pre-freshman and mid-senior periods in terms of their L2 writing ability/fluency and strategy-use. During the interviews, I showed the participants a table or a figure containing the actual changes in these variables. In terms of their motivational changes, I showed them the transcription of what they had said when asked which aspects of English writing they wanted to improve in each of the four data-collection sessions. Concerning these accounts, I also asked them additional questions about what other aspects, if any, they might have wanted to improve for the given year, why they had these particular goals and what they did to achieve these goals. When they did not mention any aspect they wanted to improve, I showed them a list (written in Japanese) of possible areas to be improved in L2 writing based on the Cumming's (2006) scheme to probe L2 writing motivation. The entries on the list had been revised as the result of a pilot trial with five students from the same population, and the final list included grammar, vocabulary, organization, planning/revising, speed, quantity, content, various types of writing (e.g. letters, reports), various genres (e.g. narrative, exposition), resistance against writing L2, and personal growth. The entire post-senior interview session lasted for 30–40 minutes. The participants' spoken accounts were all tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Analysis of all the interview data

When analyzing the transcribed interview data, I basically followed Miles and Huberman's (1994: 245) data synthesis tactics, especially those of 'noting patterns, themes, seeing plausibility, and clustering', and 'making contrasts/comparisons'. As in Sasaki (2004), I used the interview data related to the participants' L2 writing ability changes to better

interpret the quantitative data of their L2 composition score changes. For the participants' motivational changes, however, I analyzed the data for their own sake following Yang *et al.*'s (2004) research framework based on Engeström's (1987) expanded activity system. The basic principles of activity theory originated from Vygotsky's (e.g. 1978) idea that artifacts or sociocultural entities mediate human thought processes and actions when humans (subjects) operate on objects. This idea was further developed by Leont'ev (e.g. 1981) who focused more on the human relationships and development entailed by activities 'in the process of cooperative labor and social interaction' (Leont'ev, 1981: 56). More recently, Leont'ev's theory was expanded into Engeström's (1987) model of activity system, incorporating additional concepts such as 'rules', 'communities' and 'division of labor'. The model is graphically represented as a triangle with community, roles and division of labor affecting both subject and object (and possible outcomes outside the triangle), which are mediated by mediating artifacts (e.g. Figure 1.2 in Engeström, 1999). Yang *et al.*'s (2004: 15) example below is helpful to understand this model:

To take an example of second language (L2) learning, a student (subject) in an ESL class aims to improve her competence in academic English writing (object). This student may follow the teacher's instruction, do assignments, read a textbook, talk with friends, surf the Internet, refer to dictionaries and so on (mediating artifacts). After a period of practice this student may achieve her goal such as getting a high grade on her essays (outcome). This activity happens in the ESL class (community), and the student intends to grasp the conventions of academic English writing (rules). In this ESL class, the teacher provides model instruction, gives assignments, and offers feedback, and students follow their teacher and do the assignments (division of labor).

In addition to the categories originally used by Yang *et al.* (2004), in the present study I included two more categories of 'imagined L2-related community' and 'imagined non-L2-related community' because in the process of analyzing the interview data, I realized that they were also important for understanding the participants' motivational changes. Consequently, I changed the term 'community' in Yang *et al.*'s scheme to 'actual L2-related community' to distinguish it from the two imagined communities. For the term 'imagined community', I followed Kanno and Norton's (2003: 241) definition of 'groups of people, not immediately

tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination'.

Results and Discussion

L2 writing ability

I present the participants' changes in L2 composition scores for descriptive purposes. In addition, I used analysis of variance (ANOVA) to check the degree of the changes between the pre-freshman and mid-senior periods, using SPSS Version 6.1 (SPSS Incorporated, 1994). Because of the small sample sizes, however, the results of the ANOVA analyses should not be generalized.

As shown in Table 2.4, the changes in the four groups' total composition scores increased until their sophomore year, but the AH group's score decreased after that, and dropped below their freshman level for their senior composition. In contrast, the three SA groups' senior year composition scores were all higher than those of their freshman compositions, although the SA-8/11 group was the only one that kept improving until their senior year (see the Appendix for examples of their improvement). A two-way ANOVA comparing the four groups' differences between their freshman and senior years indicated a significant interaction between the time and group effects ($F(3, 18) = 6.77, p < 0.01$).

The results of subsequent *post-hoc* simple effects analyses (Tanaka & Yamagiwa, 1992) revealed that the four groups were not significantly

Table 2.4 Mean total composition scores (Total Possible = 200) at the four different observation periods

Group	Pre-freshman (M (SD))	Mid-sophomore (M (SD))	Mid-junior (M (SD))	Mid-senior (M (SD))
At home (n = 5)	125.20 (14.02)	140.40 (13.07)	138.60 (13.76)	123.20 (7.89)
SA-2 (n = 6)	109.17 (18.68)	128.00 (21.84)	126.67 (17.24)	130.17 (26.72)
SA-4 (n = 3)	123.33 (1.15)	153.00 (8.19)	169.67 (7.51)	163.67 (16.86)
SA-8/11 (n = 8)	131.38 (16.08)	155.63 (10.06)	159.38 (15.17)	162.00 (6.85)

different when they were freshmen, but that they were significantly different as seniors ($F(3, 18) = 8.22, p < 0.01$ for their freshman year; and $F(1, 20) = 33.59, p < 0.01$ for their senior year). Furthermore, the time effect was significant for the composition score changes for all three SA groups ($F(1, 18) = 9.67, p < 0.01$ for the SA-2 group; $F(1, 18) = 35.67, p < 0.01$ for the SA-4 group; and $F(1, 18) = 20.56, p < 0.01$ for the SA-8/11 group), but not for the AH group. That is, the three SA groups significantly improved their composition scores over 3.5 years, but the AH group did not. Subsequent multiple comparisons by the Least Significant Difference Method ($MSE = 89.27, p < 0.05$) indicate that when they were seniors, the SA-4 and SA-8/11 groups' scores were significantly higher than those of the AH and SA-2 groups, but that the pair of the AH and SA-2 groups, and the pair of the SA-4 and the SA-8/11 groups were not significantly different from each other.

At the individual level, two of the AH students' English composition scores decreased over 3.5 years, and the other three students' scores slightly increased. However, just like the AH students in Sasaki (2007), all of them felt that their English writing ability deteriorated especially after their junior year because they had had fewer English classes and fewer opportunities to write in English. In contrast, all of the SA students' English composition scores improved over the 3.5 years. Two SA-2 and three SA-4 students attributed their score increase mainly to the English writing classes they took at the Japanese university, four SA-8/11 students attributed their score increase to the English writing classes they took abroad, one SA-2 student and five SA-8/11 students attributed their increases to both the classes they took in Japan and abroad, one SA-2 student said that writing emails to friends she made abroad was the only helpful factor and the last SA-2 student said that the junior and senior compositions were simply easier to write.

The 10 SA students who attributed their score increase to their overseas L2 writing classes all added that the experiences of learning how to write (e.g. how to organize an effective paragraph), and having to write much and often (both for ESL and other classes) were especially helpful. These results concur with those of previous cross-sectional and longitudinal studies (e.g. Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2001; Sasaki, 2004) in that the two factors of L2 writing metaknowledge and practice influenced L2 writing development. In contrast, the AH students all felt that their English writing ability worsened after their junior year because they had fewer English classes. This is especially noteworthy when we recall that many of the SA students whose scores increased for their senior compositions, also had fewer English classes after becoming seniors

(Table 2.2). In spite of what they claimed, the perceived and actual deterioration of the AH students' L2 writing ability as seniors could be better explained by their low motivation rather than reduced L2 contact hours (see also the next section).

L2 writing motivation

Table 2.5 presents the changes in the four group members' L2 writing motivation in terms of the relevant components of the revised version of Yang *et al.*'s (2004) research scheme based on Engeström's (1987) expanded activity systems. The descriptions presented in the table are the tendencies shared by more than half of the members of each group. In the activity of studying L2 writing over 3.5 years, the components of 'rules' and 'division of labor' basically remained the same. That is, the participants studied how to write in the genre of academic writing, and the teachers taught the English classes where they learned these rules. The participants' changes in the other components are shown in Table 2.5.

The first four rows of Table 2.5a show the characteristics of the four groups' L2 writing motivation when they were freshmen. Under the column for object (i.e. what they wanted to improve), we can see that the four groups were all motivated to improve some aspects of their L2 writing. The only difference is that, as can be seen in the column of mediating artifacts (i.e. what were involved in the participants' trying to attain their objects), except for the AH group, all the other groups used textbooks, dictionaries and teachers to achieve their goals. In other words, unlike the other three groups, the AH group remained in what Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) call the 'preactional phase', without crossing the 'metaphorical "Rubicon" by actually embarking on the task' (Dörnyei, 2001: 88). In fact, 60% of them reported doing nothing to improve their L2 writing throughout the 3.5-year observation period. Such low motivation of the AH group helps us better explain why their L2 composition scores decreased after their junior year, whereas the other three groups' scores did not, despite the fact that they all took similar numbers of L2 classes as seniors.

The four groups' characteristics presented in Table 2.5b for their sophomore year were similar to those for their freshman year except that 10 (58.8%) of the SA students had a SA experience in that year. Recall that even before going abroad, the SA-4 and SA-8/11 groups had to study hard to achieve high TOEFL scores. In addition, the three SA groups' overseas experiences in their sophomore year influenced their

Table 2.5 Students' L2 writing motivation and related components

Group	Object	Mediating artifact	Actual L2-related community	L2-related imagined community	Non-L2-related imagined community	Outcome
(a) Freshman year						
At-home (n = 5)	Grammar (60%); vocabulary (60%)	Nothing (60%)	EFL classes (100%)			Improved L2 writing ability (60%)
SA-2 (n = 6)	Grammar (66.7%); vocabulary (83.3%); quantity (50%); confidence (50%)	Textbooks, dictionary, teachers (83.3%)	EFL classes (100%)			Improved L2 writing ability (100%)
SA-4 (n = 3)	Grammar (100%); vocabulary (100%); quantity (66.7%)	Textbooks, dictionary, teachers (100%)	EFL classes (100%)			Improved L2 writing ability (100%)
SA-8/11 (n = 8)	Vocabulary (87.5%); quantity (62.5%)	Textbooks, dictionary, teachers (87.5%)	EFL classes (100%)			Improved L2 writing ability (100%)
(b) Sophomore year						
At-home (n = 5)	Grammar (60%)	Nothing (60%)	EFL classes (100%)			Improved L2 writing ability (60%)

Table 2.5 (Continued)

Group	Object	Mediating artifact	Actual L2-related community	L2-related imagined community	Non-L2-related imagined community	Outcome
SA-2 (n = 6)	Grammar (83.3%); vocabulary (66.7%); quantity (66.7%)	Books (66.7%)	ESL classes (33.3% for two months) EFL classes (100%)			Improved L2 writing ability (83.3%)
SA-4 (n = 3)	Grammar (100%); vocabulary (100%); quantity (66.7%)	Grammar reference books (66.7%)	ESL classes (33.3% for four months) EFL classes (100%)			Improved L2 writing ability (100%)
SA-8/11 (n = 8)	Vocabulary (50%); quantity (50%)	Textbooks, dictionary, teachers (87.5%)	ESL classes (62.5% for 8–11 months) EFL classes (100%)			Improved L2 writing ability (62.5%)
(c) Junior year						
At-home (n = 5)	Grammar (80%)	Nothing (60%)	EFL classes (100%)			Improved L2 writing ability (40%). Decreased L2 writing ability (40%)

Table 2.5 (Continued)

Group	Object	Mediating artifact	Actual L2-related community	L2-related imagined community	Non-L2-related imagined community	Outcome
SA-2 (n = 6)	Grammar (100%); vocabulary (50%); quantity (66.7%)	E-mail (66.7%)	ESL classes (50.0% for two months) EFL classes (100%)	NES/foreign e-mail-pals/ pen-pals (66.7%)		Decreased L2 writing ability (83.3%)
SA-4 (n = 3)	Vocabulary (100%); organization (66.7%); planning (66.7%); content (66.7%)	Teachers (66.7%)	EFL classes (100%)	ESL classes (100%)		Improved L2 writing ability (100%)
SA-8/11 (n = 8)	Content (50%)	TOEIC ^a / TOEFL (62.5%); NES friends (62.5%)	ESL classes (37.5% for 8–10 months) EFL classes (100%)	ESL classes (87.5%)		Improved L2 writing ability (50%). Moti- vated to write better in L2
(d) Senior year						
At-home (n = 5)	Grammar (60%)	Nothing (60%)	EFL classes (100%)		The community of the profes- sionals of their choice (80%)	Decreased L2 writing ability (80%). Lost interest in studying L2 writing (80%)

Table 2.5 (Continued)

Group	Object	Mediating artifact	Actual L2-related community	L2-related imagined community	Non-L2-related imagined community	Outcome
SA-2 (n = 6)	Grammar (100%); how to write e-mail/ letters (50%); vocabulary (50%)	E-mail (83.3%)	ESL classes (16.7% for two months) EFL classes (100%)	NES/foreign e-mail-pals/ pen-pals (88.3%)	The community of the profes- sionals of their choice (83.3%)	Improved L2 writing ability (83.3%)
SA-4 (n = 3)	Vocabulary (66.7%)	TOEIC ^a /Step Test ^b (100%)	EFL classes (100%)	ESL classes (66.7%)	The community of the profes- sionals of their choice (100%)	Decreased L2 writing ability (66.7%). Motivated to write better in L2 (100%)
SA-8/11 (n = 8)	Content (75%)	Self-directed writing (62.5%); dictionary, reference books (50%)	EFL classes (100%)	ESL classes (87.5%)	The community of the profes- sionals of their choice (87.5%)	Improved L2 writing ability (50%). Motivated to write better in L2 (87.5%)

^aTest of English for International Communication.^bSociety for Testing English Proficiency.

Note. The descriptions in the cells in (a) to (d) are given if they were shared by more than half of the participants.

subsequent motivational behavior for L2 writing. One noticeable consequence of such influences is that the three SA groups as juniors and seniors formed some kind of 'L2-related imagined communities' that had not existed before. That is, after they became juniors, when they studied L2 writing, many of them came to imagine communities where people would use L2 for actual communicative purposes. For example, many SA-2 group members kept in touch with the L1 English-speaking or foreign friends they had become acquainted with while abroad, and corresponded with them through email after coming home. Although they did not receive emails from such friends every day, they imagined their life through received emails, and spent time thinking how best to reply to them. Many of them said that they used such email letter writing to improve their L2 writing. Interestingly, when they became seniors, writing good email letters even became one of their L2 writing goals.

In contrast, the other two SA groups mainly imagined ESL and other overseas class communities when they wrote in L2. Unlike the SA-2 students, they did not imagine email pen pals when writing in L2, although all of them used email to keep in touch with their overseas friends. This might be because these two groups had more opportunities to write in classes than the SA-2 group while abroad. In the ESL and/or other writing classes, they learned how to organize effective compositions, and in both ESL and regular classes, they wrote different types of texts (e.g. term papers, speech drafts) much and often. When they had to write in L2 after coming home, 100% of the SA-4 group and 87.5% of the SA-8/11 group remembered the time they were writing for the classes they took abroad, and they still expressed their desire to write better in L2, as exemplified in Sayuri's remarks in Example 1.

Example 1

Sayuri (who spent nine months in the USA was explaining how her motivation to write better in English had emerged): When I was in the USA,

Miyuki: Yes?

Sayuri: There was an institute where teachers read my term papers before I turned them in.

Miyuki: Uh, huh.

Sayuri: Having my papers revised there was useful.

Miyuki: Yeah, it must be useful.

Sayuri: I always tried to write better so that the revision there would be minimal. And even now I always try to make such revision minimal when I write in English.

Such motivation is qualitatively different from the SA-2 students' motivation to simply improve one particular aspect (i.e. email letter writing) of their L2 writing. The difference may also be reflected in the fact that only SA-4 and SA-8/11 groups were motivated to improve the 'content' of their L2 writing after their junior year (Table 2.5c,d). Furthermore, the post-senior interviews asking about changes in specific L2 strategy-use reveal that after coming home, one (33.3%) SA-4 student and four (50%) SA-8/11 students started to pay more attention to rhetorical refinement even when translating from L1 to L2 while writing in L2. None of the AH and SA-2 groups reported such changes. These findings imply that the task of writing may no longer have been the same for the four groups of students after becoming juniors. For the AH and SA-2 groups, the writing task was something they would do when asked to do so, but they were not particularly motivated to do a good job. In contrast, those who had been abroad for more than four months could imagine the possible audience and how to write well, and they often spent much time and energy refining their expressions. In other words, over 3.5 years, 'the same task' of L2 writing became 'different activities' (Coughlan & Duff, 1994: 173) for those four groups of students.

Lastly, related to their senior year (see Table 2.5d), the most noticeable difference from the other years was that many participants formed imagined communities consisting of the professionals of their choice (e.g. an information technology community). That is, when they became seniors, they had some kinds of professional communities they wanted to be members of. Out of the 22 participants, however, only four (one AH, one SA-4, two SA-8/11) had L2-related imagined communities (e.g. a community of English teachers). Although their major (British and American studies) was related to L2 (English), not many graduates at this university (e.g. only 16% in 2006) actually obtained directly L2-related jobs. Consequently, their imagined communities did not always encourage L2 writing improvement. In fact, 80% of the AH group and 66.7% of the SA-4 group had a decrease in their senior L2 composition score, and in the post-senior interviews, all of them attributed this decrease to their intensive job-hunting. And yet, 62.5% of the SA-8/11 group still voluntarily practiced L2 writing (e.g. writing for different topics) to improve the 'content' of their L2 writing, even though such actions did not directly benefit their future career. This indicates that their motivation had become more intrinsic in that they were engaged in 'an ongoing process of seeking and attempting to conquer optimal challenges' (Deci & Ryan, 1985: 32).

These participants' changes in L2 writing motivation in relation to their L2 writing ability development over 3.5 years suggest characteristics unique to FL writers. Recall that all participants, including the AH students, took a relatively large number of English classes until their junior year at the university (Table 2.2). This can explain why even the AH students with low motivation kept improving their L2 compositions until their junior year. Table 2.4 shows that as long as they were exposed to L2 and asked to write in L2, their L2 writing ability could develop even when they made no extra efforts outside the classrooms. As I discussed in the previous section, the two factors of L2 writing metaknowledge and writing practice they gained in L2 writing classes were especially helpful. When that external force of L2 classes diminished, however, students seem to have needed to imagine L2-related communities to keep improving. Considering that the SA-4 and SA-8/11 students improved significantly more than the other two groups over 3.5 years, the former groups' motivation to write better content, imagining the actual L2 writing classrooms might have provoked stronger motivation than the SA-2 students' simply imagining email pen pals. Furthermore, when an impeding factor such as job-hunting entered into their lives, only the SA-8/11 students, who became intrinsically motivated, continued to develop. This group might be the only one expected to improve in the future because such improvement is often not crucial for the learners' social survival in the type of FL situations targeted in the present study.

These findings are in sharp contrast with those of the studies conducted by Cumming and his colleagues (e.g. Cumming, 2006) targeting SL students in Canada. Their participants not only set various objects in terms of L2 writing goals, but also actually took action to act on those goals. Given that many of them were preparing for their university studies, they had immediate needs, such as class assignments to complete, in order to survive in such situations. The participants in the present study, on the other hand, could afford not to pursue improvement in their L2 writing ability as long as they passed their English classes. Such a lack of action to achieve higher-level goals seems a particular characteristic of the FL students represented by the AH group in the present study.

Conclusion

The present study illustrates how FL students' L2 writing ability and motivation changed over 3.5 years, and how individual changes were

significantly affected by various sociocultural factors. The study was also unique in examining the long-term effects of SA experiences on L2 writing ability development. The findings reveal that (1) the two factors of gaining L2 metaknowledge and L2 writing practice were especially helpful for developing L2 writing ability; (2) only those students who spent some time abroad formed an L2-related 'imagined community' that potentially motivated them to improve their L2 writing ability; (3) only those students who spent more than four months abroad became motivated to write better in L2, imagining the writing classes they took abroad; (4) after external factors started to impede their studying L2 writing, students needed intrinsic motivation to continue to improve. These findings exemplify the merits of investigating FL phenomena in a socially situated manner.

Despite these findings, however, the present study is still limited in many ways, and should be followed by future studies. First, the study should be replicated, and the findings should be confirmed by studies with larger sample sizes. Because the sample size for each group was small in the present study, individual differences may have masked general patterns that might have emerged if the sample sizes had been larger. On the other hand, however, we also need more in-depth studies of how each individual's changes are affected by various sociocultural factors in order not to overlook critical individual differences, which might be washed away in a search for generalizable patterns. For example, we need to investigate why and how each student chooses (or does not choose) to spend different lengths of time abroad in the first place. Furthermore, after students spend some time abroad, we need to know how (differently) such SA students possibly form L2-related imagined communities, and how such communities help to motivate the students to write better in L2. This seems especially important if we consider that not all FL students can afford to spend time abroad (Dörnyei, 2001). Pedagogically, it would be ideal if we could find a way to create L2-related imagined communities in students' minds without necessarily sending them abroad. Exploring a similar implication, Yashima (2007) reported that Japanese students became more willing to communicate in English by being introduced to an 'imagined international community' (e.g. a Model United Nation) through a 'cognitively and emotionally involving' content-based English class. Applying such a method might be a promising way to increase students' motivation to write in L2 in FL settings. Finally, we also need to investigate why and how only the SA-8/11 group became intrinsically motivated to keep studying L2 writing in a rather autonomous manner. Because more than

one year had passed since most of them (70.6%) came home, their SA experiences may not have been directly relevant. Further in-depth studies of SA-8/11 types of learners' changes over time in a motivational research framework (Dörnyei, 2001) may provide a key to inducing long-lasting motivation in FL learners such as those studied in the present research.

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Appendix

Freshman and senior compositions written by Makoto, a SA-8/11 student

Makoto's freshman composition (given 67 points)

PROMPT: There has been a heated discussion in an English newspaper about introducing English as an elementary-school subject in Japan. Some people think that English should be taught at the elementary-school level, whereas others believe that it is too early. Suppose you are writing for the readers' opinion column. Take one of the positions described above and write your opinion within 30 minutes. [Original in Japanese, translated by the author.]

I agree with the suggestion that it is early to teach English for elementary school student. Because both English and Japanese are difficult. When I was student, I thought why school classes are so difficult. And I became slow learner. I can't understand classes. So there are many slow learners like me. They were thinking that that were same to me. If elementary school student have to study English, they confuse their brain. And they'll be not able to understand classes more and more. I think it makes Japanese student bad. The more study hard, the more become bad. English isn't so easy. It will be pain for person who isn't good at English. I think English must not study hard. Only student who is interest in English must study. Elementary school only teach human life is good.

Makoto's senior composition (given 162 points)

PROMPT: There has been a heated discussion in an English newspaper about university student life. Some people think that university students should not have part-time jobs, whereas others believe that it is advisable for them to work part-time. Suppose you are writing for the readers' opinion column...

University students have too much free time people usually believe. It might or might not be true because university is a place where students learn a lot of things which are more advanced than they have done. There are many argument about the way university students spend time, but I think they are missing something important. Working as a part time job will not help students' future.

The most important thing is that part-time job is completely different from that of full time workers. Part-time workers are not responsible for the sales, which is the biggest difference between them. Some people even committed suicide to take responsibility of his failure in contract with other company. It is much harder to work as a full time job. For the reason, people should stop thinking that working as a part-time job is a kind of experience for their future.

In addition, there are much more important things only university students can do, such as club activity, research, volunteer and so on. Since university course normally finishes in four year, students have experience those things before graduating. That will be more significant than anything, working, even taking a class, because students can learn how people become adult through those experiences that students get involved in social activity. That is why I don't think students should work.

