# THE ROLE OF TAGALOG IN ESL WRITING: CLUES FROM STUDENTS' THINK-ALOUD PROTOCOLS

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*To explore the role of the L1 in L2 writing, 30 first-year college students were taped as they thought aloud while writing an essay in English. The tapes were transcribed and analyzed, and a total of 615 composing behaviors were verbalized in their L1, Tagalog. The eight composing behaviors that were verbalized most frequently in Tagalog were text evaluation (25%), brainstorming (23%), lexical insertion and substitution (20%), idea evaluation (17%), organizing/deciding (5%), self-instruction (4%), metacomments (4%), and idea elicitation (2%). Results showed that the L1 facilitated planning and revising processes, and enabled the postponement of low-level writing goals so L2 writers can attend to higher level writing goals. Writing teachers need to reassess the role of the L1 in the L2 writing classroom, and explore the potential benefits that may be reaped when L2 learners tap their L1 as they plan, retrieve, generate, organize, evaluate, and revise their written products.*

## 1. Introduction

The bilingual nature of most, if not all, Filipino students prompts the question of what roles their first language (L1) plays when they write in English as a second language (ESL). The different schools of thought on this issue make the claim that the L1 may interfere, facilitate, or have no influence on writing in a second language. Prior research on the role of the writer's L1 in L2 writing has made use of both product- and process-based methodologies, and has yielded inconclusive results. For instance, in her studies of L1 Chinese subjects writing in L2 English, Lay (1982) found that the use of L1 Chinese while composing aloud in L2 English facilitated writing in the target language. Subjects wrote better L2 compositions when they engaged in more L1-L2 switches in their think-aloud protocols. More specifically, Lay (1982) found that when her subjects translated key words into their L1, they obtained a stronger impression and association of ideas for their essays, showing that semantic knowledge in the L1 enabled them to generate better L2 structures. This led Lay to conclude that L1 use proved beneficial in L2 writing, producing better essays in terms of ideas, organization, and details.

Furthermore, Lay also found that certain topics induced more L1 switches than others did. For example, if knowledge about the topic was acquired in the L1, then there would be more L1 switches when the subject wrote on that topic. She also found that some subjects who preferred to use Chinese characters when writing notes seemed to have well-developed strategies for evoking images which they could later use during actual writing.

In another study, Edelsky (1982) investigated the writing processes of L1 Spanish children in a bilingual program in a small, semi-rural school district. Results from this study showed that the knowledge that writers already have about writing processes in their L1 was applied to, rather than interfered with, writing in their L2. Specifically, certain writing skills in one language, like spelling and style manipulation, helped Edelsky's young writers write in the target language, suggesting that the composing skills of good L2 writers were similar to those of good L1 writers. Edelsky (1982) viewed the relationship between L1 and L2 writing as an instance of the application of L1 strategies to L2 writing rather than an interference. These observations led Edelsky to conclude that what a writer knew about L1 writing formed the basis for new hypotheses regarding writing in the L2 rather than interfered with it.

The idea that a writer's L1 did not interfere in L2 writing is further supported by Das (1985, as cited by Mohan & Lo, 1985), who compared rhetorical strategies in the L1 and L2 expository writing of bilingual undergraduate students in India. His findings cast doubt on the claim that L1 interference caused poor performance in the target language and suggest that L1 interference was not an important factor at the rhetorical level of L2 compositions. Rather, what may be more critical was the student's general level of development in writing. The results from these studies suggest that it may be beneficial to use the L1 in certain stages of writing in a second language.

Similarly, Friedlander (1990) suggested that a writer's L1 aided in the retrieval of information on L1-related topics. He also proposed that positive transfer of L1-related content was enhanced when writers wrote in the language in which the information was acquired. This implied that using the L1 seemed to allow better retrieval of ideas, regardless of the language used to acquire the content or topic knowledge. In short, translation did not seem to hinder text production. Friedlander further suggested that ESL writers should be encouraged to use their L1 while composing their first drafts.

In the midst of these studies claiming that L1 use facilitated L2 writing are studies that claim otherwise. For instance, in their review of Lay's studies, Jones and Tetroe (1987) pointed out that her findings may not be generalizable to other L2 writing contexts or to other L2 writers but may only apply to L1 Chinese subjects. They pointed out that Chinese does not share the same writing system as English, and that this difference in orthography between the L1 and the target language was not accounted for. Lay's also failed to explain the meaningfulness of using Chinese characters in planning and note-taking, and

did not measure the relative amounts of L1 and L2 usage in her subjects' protocol or report any pattern to the switches.

Based on the results of their study on composing in a second language, Jones and Tetroe (1987) argued that L2 writing required more cognitive capacity than L1 writing. Thus, the L2 writer is left with less cognitive resources for other tasks, like making higher level plans, monitoring, and revising. However, they also found that an increase in L2 proficiency did not necessarily free enough cognitive resources to produce significantly better L2 writing. Hence, while limited L2 proficiency seemed to constrain the effectiveness of L2 writing processes, it only reduced the quantity, but not the quality, of the planning engaged in by the L2 writers.

Other studies that focused on the L1-L2 interface and the issue of transfer of composing processes and strategies have found that L1 and L2 composing processes were basically similar for the same writer. For example, in her protocol-based study of six writers who wrote in their L1 and L2, Arndt (1987) found that the composing activities of her subjects were consistent across languages. She also found that a limited awareness of the nature of the task was a common source of difficulty in both L1 and L2 writing. In other words, constraints from not knowing the objective of the writing task and unfamiliarity with the type of discourse created problems in L2 writing, not simply the difficulties with the mechanics or code of the target language. Frederiksen and Dominic (1981) made similar observations when they said that cognitive demands associated with writing were constrained by the context, task, purpose or problem, or external and internal constraints.

In the face of results from these studies indicating a relationship between L1 and L2 writing, the importance of studying L2 composing processes becomes apparent. Prior research suggests that the composing activities of individual writers are not consistent across different L1s in different writing tasks. Thus, it is important that studies that investigate the composing processes of writers be task-specific, because there appears to be no universal composing process that a writer engages in for all writing contexts. This means that the writer's unfamiliarity with the topic, writing task, expository writing conventions, and target language may cause L2 writing difficulty, and that limited L2 proficiency could also prevent the expression of complex ideas which are encoded in the L1 (Reid, 1990).

Moreover, the inconclusive results reported in the literature reviewed, and the paucity of L1-L2 writing studies conducted in the Philippine context that make use of process tracing methods, call for a fine-grained analysis of the various functions performed by the L1, in this case, Tagalog, in L2 writing. Thus, the present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1.  What composing processes are reported in Tagalog in the student writers' think-aloud protocols?

2. What are the most frequently occurring composing processes reported in Tagalog?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

Thirty first-year college students from De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines participated in the present study. They came from three intact classes, 10 from each class, taught by the researcher. There were 23 females and seven males in the group, ranging in age from 15 to 19 years old. The students' responses to a demographic questionnaire revealed that 12 spoke mainly Tagalog outside school, while 18 spoke mainly Tagalog and another language (either Chinese or another Philippine language) outside school.

The students signed a consent form indicating their willingness to participate in the study, and were informed that their participation or non-participation would not in any way affect their grades. The students then signed up for the taping schedule that was most convenient for them. The think-aloud sessions were conducted within a four-month period.

### 2.2 Procedure

Prior to the taping session, the participants wrote a practice think-aloud essay at home on one of two prompts: their best and worst high school teachers or a comparison-contrast of two shopping malls. A cassette tape of their think-aloud was submitted to the researcher as proof that the self-administered practice think-aloud was indeed performed according to the set of procedures to be followed in the actual think-aloud session.

The topic for the think-aloud was designed to elicit an argumentative essay that allowed students to express their opinions and defend their stand. This rhetorical device was chosen because it prompted students to include both factual details and personal beliefs in their writing, thereby encouraging them to be more productive both in content and expression.

Taping started when the researcher began reading the General Instructions to the think-aloud participants:

> *We're interested in how people write. I'm going to give you a sheet of paper with an essay topic and you'll have 90 minutes to complete the activity. You may use as little or as much of that time as you need. As soon as you get the topic, begin by reading it aloud and saying out loud anything and everything that you're thinking, reading and writing. Verbalize your thoughts in the language in which you're thinking them and don't worry about whether what you're thinking is relevant or polite or smart; just say it.*

*You should be talking almost all of the time and if you forget to speak your thoughts, I'll remind you by saying, "Keep talking". However, remember that you are not talking to me. You're just verbalizing what you're thinking as you read the topic and write the essay so do what you normally do when you write. You will write using pen and paper. If you make a mistake just cross it out. If you want to use the dictionary or thesaurus provided, feel free. Do you have any questions? I'll give you a practice topic first as a warm up before the actual topic. Begin by reading the topic.*

The practice writing prompt was "Write a short paragraph describing what you do to relax or unwind after a hectic week in school." The students spent about five minutes trying to develop a paragraph on this topic before they became comfortable enough to move on to the think-aloud prompt:

*Since its invention, television has had a great impact on people's lives. It fostered the growth and development of a global community and made worldwide communication possible. However, television has also been blamed for the spread of wrong moral values.*

*Using examples by which television has improved or damaged modern society, write an essay that discusses these two positions. Explain whether television has had more positive or more negative influences and give reasons for your position.*

*You have 90 minutes to write the essay. You may use as little or as much of that time as you need. Verbalize your thoughts in the language in which you are thinking them. Puwedeng magsalita ng Bicolano, Cebuano, Hokkien, Ilocano, Ilonggo, Kapampangan, Mandarin, Spanish, Tagalog, Waray at iba pa [You can speak in Bicolano, Cebuano, Hokkien, Ilocano, Ilonggo, Kapampangan, Mandarin, Spanish, Tagalog, Waray or any other language.]. So don't worry about whether what you are saying is relevant or polite or smart; JUST SAY IT, so do what you normally do when you write an essay. If you make a mistake, just cross it out. You may use the dictionary and thesaurus provided if you wish.*

The participants were encouraged to verbalize in the language of their choice. Furthermore, the topic of the writing prompt – positive and negative effects of television on society – were neither L1 nor L2 specific so they were free to use either language in generating ideas about the topics.

The students wrote using pen and paper to simulate writing in classroom conditions. They were instructed to verbalize whatever came to their minds as they wrote, in whatever language they were thinking. They were also instructed not to erase mistakes but to merely cross them out. They were audiotape recorded as they simultaneously verbalized and wrote. The researcher stayed in the background, was not visible to the students and intervened only to prompt

them to "Keep talking" if they remained silent for more than fifteen seconds. The participants were able to work independently and generally refrained from addressing the researcher who stayed out of sight and therefore could not have given non-verbal cues. The tapes were transcribed and coded by two independent raters in terms of reported composing behaviors, and intonation patterns were attended to in categorizing the students' verbalizations. The two coders reached 93% agreement in coding the protocols, and disagreements were subsequently resolved through discussion.

## 2.3 Analysis

Data from the think-aloud sessions included transcripts of the students' verbalizations, notes that they wrote as they planned their essays, and their handwritten drafts. The typed transcripts were divided into t-units, which is an independent clause and all its subordinate elements (Hunt, 1970). Each t-unit may consist of one or more reported composing behaviors separated by double slashes [//]. Each composing behavior was identified and coded using a modified taxonomy (Flower & Hayes, 1980a, 1980b, 1981a, 1981b; Perl, 1979, 1980a, 1980b; Pianko, 1979; Witte & Cherry, 1994) which lists six main types of composing behaviors, and a total of 32 specific composing behaviors to ensure that no instances of simultaneous multiple coding occurred. After all 30 protocols were analyzed and coded in terms of these composing behaviors, those protocols that contained Tagalog verbalizations were identified. A frequency count of the composing behaviors that were verbalized in Tagalog was then done.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Twenty-one out of 30 transcripts contained Tagalog verbalizations, and a total of 615 composing behaviors were verbalized in this language. The transcripts contained between three to 224 composing behaviors verbalized in Tagalog, or a mean of 29 in each transcript. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of occurrence of the eight types of composing behaviors that were verbalized in Tagalog.

## Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Occurrence of Composing Behaviors Verbalized in Tagalog

| Composing Behavior | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| Text Evaluation | 153 | 24.88 |
| Brainstorming | 140 | 22.76 |
| Lexical Insertion/Substitution | 120 | 19.51 |
| Idea Evaluation | 107 | 17.40 |
| Organizational Decision | 32 | 5.20 |
| Instruction to Self | 30 | 4.88 |
| Metacomments | 22 | 3.58 |
| Elicited Idea | 11 | 1.79 |
| **TOTAL** | 615 | 100 |

### 3.1 Text Evaluation

Text evaluation refers to the positive or negative assessment of the quality and clarity of the written text or note. It was the most frequently verbalized composing behavior in Tagalog (24.88%). A positive text evaluation expresses the writer's satisfaction with the text produced or read. Consider the following examples from the protocols of Students 20 and 23.

STUDENT 20

64. *Nasagot ba?* [Did I answer the question?]
65. Give reasons for your position um eh .. **ayon [there]** .. ah

STUDENT 23

5. *Ito 'yung* [This is] for um for for those who aspire **tama [right]** aspire who aspire to be great chef or um those who are newly newlywed or rather those who are like who like to cook

In the excerpts above, both writers expressed satisfaction with their success in the composing process. Student 20 believes that she has adequately addressed the writing prompt, as signaled by *ayon* in Line 65. Similarly, Student 23 also verbalized her satisfaction at being able to put her thoughts into words so she could continue with the writing task. On the other hand, the excerpt from Student 3's transcript shows instances of negative text evaluation.

STUDENT 3

49. It has made communication *mali* [wrong]
50. It has made information possible *mali* [wrong]

The utterances of *mali* [wrong] in the excerpt above followed actual writing. In Line 49, Student 3 had already started to write a new sentence which began with *It has made communication* when he aborted the writing process and evaluated what had just been written. He then proceeded to write a new sentence which began with *It has made information possible* which he also discarded after giving it a negative evaluation. The two false starts were then followed by a reading of the previously completed sentence to get him on the right track and give him a fresh start. Let us now consider the following examples of text evaluation.

STUDENT 8

38. With this, people's minds were opened to different ideas
39. ***Pangit, ulit na naman* [Not good, I'm repeating myself]** (crosses out "beliefs and opinions")

STUDENT 20

38. The apparatus that was invented . ah .
39. ***Parang mali.*[This seems wrong.]**
40. ***Halu-halo yata.* [It's mixed up.]**
41. During the earliest part of the century people were trying to invent a new medium of instruction that will help in educating the public

The examples of text evaluation in the excerpts above occurred after a reading of a sentence and part of an unfinished sentence. These instances of text evaluation were followed by a phrase deletion (Student 8), and going back to read a completed sentence (Student 20). These examples show that a text that has been negatively evaluated may be deleted, as in the case of Student 8 who deleted the phrase *beliefs and opinions*, or ignored, as in the case of Student 20 who opted to leave the text as it is. These responses show that the students preferred to deal with a problematic text either by discarding or ignoring it.

## 3.2 Brainstorming

Brainstorming is the second most frequently verbalized composing behavior in Tagalog (22.76%). It is a type of retrieval that entails self-

questioning in order to generate ideas or move the writing process forward, as shown in Lines 12, 13 and 16 from Student 8's think-aloud protocol.

STUDENT 8

11. Television improved society
12. *Ano pa ba?* [What else?]
13. *Tapos* [Then] *ano pa'ng susunod?* [What's next?]
14. Faster communication, free expression of ideas, beliefs and opinions .. um .
15. Damaged modern society, promoted sex and violence .. um .. mm damaged modern society
16. *Ano pa ba ?* [What else?]

Another type of brainstorming is the fluid or stream-of-consciousness verbalization of the writer's thoughts which do not necessarily become part of the essay being written. In this fluid and stream-of-consciousness type of brainstorming, the ideas elicited and verbalizations made are not generated for the purpose of inclusion in the essay, but rather to express the writer's thoughts. In short, they appear to be an end in themselves rather than a means towards accomplishing the writing task. Below is an excerpt from Student 6's transcript that provides an example of this type of brainstorming.

STUDENT 6

6. *Pinapakita pa nila 'yung mga sa trailer* [They even show those in trailers]
7. *Pinapakita nila 'yung mga trailer 'yung mga ST na hindi naman talaga kailangan du'n sa palabas* [They even show the trailers showing ST (sex tripping) scenes that are not really needed in the movie]
8. *Parang ka-cheapan lang* [It's cheap]

### 3.3 Lexical Search

Lexical insertion and substitution are the two types of surface-level revision verbalized in Tagalog. These composing behaviors involve searching for the English equivalent of a Tagalog word, or verbalizing the decision-making process of choosing the right word to use in the essay proper. It is the third most frequently occurring type of composing behavior verbalized in Tagalog (19.51%). Its high incidence of occurrence implies that vocabulary concerns played a relatively large part in the ESL students' writing process. For instance, Student 1 in the excerpt below verbalizes her decision to use the phrase *each one of us* and change the word *factors* to *contributor.*

STUDENT 1

17. It would affect each one of us
18. It would affect everybody since **each one of us na lang [I'll just use 'each one of us']** 19. It would affect each one of us
25. Television is considered as one of the factors affecting...affecting factors affecting the factors affecting....is considered as one of the contributors ... **contributor hindi na lang factors [not factors]** one of the contributors affecting ... affecting the deviant actions of the people . specifically the teenagers

In another protocol, Student 19 decides to use the Tagalog word *tsismis*, since she had trouble retrieving its English translation, *gossip.* This shows how the L1 may be used as a crutch in ESL writing, due to vocabulary limitations.

## 3.4 Idea Evaluation

Once an idea has been elicited, the writer either fleshes it out and makes it part of the essay by engaging in actual writing, or evaluates the usefulness of the elicited idea first before engaging in actual writing or note-taking. When the writer evaluates an elicited idea, that evaluation is coded as an instance of idea evaluation. The evaluation can either be positive or negative and results either in the inclusion or exclusion of the elicited idea, respectively. It is the fourth most frequently reported composing behavior in Tagalog (17.40%). The excerpt from Student 20's transcript is an example of a negative idea evaluation.

STUDENT 20

25. During the earliest part of the century ah . people were uh trying to *hindi* [no]
26. Thinking of a *hindi 'thinking'.* [Not 'thinking'.]
27. *Mali 'to, eh.* [This is wrong.]
28. Trying to invent a new medium of instruction instruction that will help in educating .. the masses masses

In the excerpt above, Student 20 reads part of her essay and tries out different ways of expressing what she means. The fragments being evaluated were *thinking of* versus *trying to.* Line 28 shows that she opted to use the first construction, edited the sentence, and finally completed it. The example below is that of a positive idea evaluation, where Student 1 expresses pleasure at eliciting the idea *household chores* with her verbalization of *ayon.*

STUDENT 1

8. How to *mga household chores, ayon* [household chores, that's it]

## 3.5 Organizational Decision

Organizing/deciding composing behaviors refer to the writer's verbalized decision-making process. Organizational decisions are utterances that announce that some order is being imposed on the ideas or paragraphs being presented in the essay. They are the fifth most frequently reported composing behavior in Tagalog. While the first four composing behaviors occurred in double digit percentage rates, organizational decisions and the rest of the composing behaviors occurred in single digit percentage rates, suggesting a considerable gap in frequencies. This composing behavior usually pertained to the three-part move that the student writers appeared to favor in developing their essay, i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion. Consider the following excerpts from Student 1's protocol.

STUDENT 1

4.*Next nga muna* [I'll do the next one first]
5. *Sandali* [Wait] scratch paper
9. *Ayun, tama ka na for introduction* [There, that's enough for the introduction]
10. Then .. then second paragraph um good influences

In the excerpt above, Student 1 overtly marked her move of starting a new paragraph, as shown in Line 9. Organizational decisions also pertain to queries about structure and style, as shown in the excerpts below.

STUDENT 20

31. *Pa'no ko i-introduce 'yung advertisement?* [How do I introduce the advertisement?]
34. *Parallel pa ba 'to?* [Are these still parallel?]
54. *Pa'no ko 'to ipapasok?* [How do I include this?]

## 3.6 Instruction to Self

The composing behavior instruction to self refers to any self-directed utterance produced by the writer and epitomizes "thinking aloud." As the term suggests, the writer is literally talking to herself/himself, mainly by giving

instructions and directions or announcing the next course of action. Examples include imperatives like *teka* [wait] as shown in the excerpt from Student 10.

STUDENT 10

31. um .. ah I guess In my . Based on my observation I can say that (Rereads prompt)
32. *Teka, teka* **[wait, wait]**
33. Based on my observation I can say that we um should be more we should be more in our be more be more ah um be more select- be more selective in our in the in what in what we are watching because we may be absorbing all the negative influences we may be absorbing all the negative influences unconsciously uncon- c-o-n-s-c unconsciously
34. *Ah teka* **[ah wait]**

Self-directed instructions can also take the form of declarative statements (Students 1 and 19) and exhortations (Student 20), as shown in the excerpts below.

STUDENT 1

11. *Kailangan may i-add ako* **[I need to add something]**
12. *I-expand ko 'yung sa current events* **[I'll expand on current events]**
13. *Gawa pa 'kong sentence* **[I'll write another sentence]**

STUDENT 19

34. *Basahin ko ulit.* **[I'll read it again.]**

STUDENT 20

14. *Baguhin na natin 'yung simula* **[Let's revise the introduction.]**
15. *Singitan natin* **[Let's insert something]**
23. *Pagsamahin na lang natin* **[Let's just combine these]**

The examples of the composing behavior instruction to self show that the ESL writers' instructions had to do with pausing the composing process (wait), or announcing a revision to be made on the text (I'll do X). There were no self-directed instructions to actively evaluate the ideas retrieved or the text produced thus far. Instances of idea and text evaluation were mostly incidental and not consciously nor deliberately engaged in by the ESL writers.

### 3.7 Metacomment

Metacomments are utterances expressing the writer's feelings or opinions about the composing process or essay. Two types of metacomments in Tagalog were identified in the students' think-aloud protocols: negative comments directed at the essay or the composing process, and interjections expressing the writer's surprise or annoyance. A negative metacomment is an utterance that conveys the writer's dissatisfaction, discomfort, disapproval, desperation or difficulty. It may be directed at the composing process in general or idea generation in particular, the quality of the text being produced or read, or the modification being made on the text. Consider the excerpt from Student 20's protocol.

STUDENT 20

130. *Pagod na 'ko mag-isip.* [**I'm tired of thinking.**]
131. *Pagod na 'ko.* [**I'm tired.**]
132. *Aray ko.* [**Ouch.**]
133. *Sumasakit na'ng ulo ko* [**My head hurts.**]

The examples of negative metacomments in Student 20's protocol expressed her physical discomfort with the process of simultaneously writing and thinking aloud [1]. Such negative metacomments suggest that the act of thinking aloud while writing may have caused uneasiness on the part of this writer, resulting in a considerably longer time (two hours) spent on the writing task.

The other type of metacomment is an interjection which is an expression of annoyance or surprise signaling the writer's awareness of something amiss in the text or the composing process, as exemplified in Line 34, with Student 7's sudden utterance of *ay!*.

STUDENT 7

33. *Depende rin sa values ng person* [It also depends on a person's values]
34. **um** *ay!* [**oh!**] Another thing *yung sa* advantages [for advantages] . is that we watch television for relaxation -xation and to unwind for relaxation

In the example of an interjection from the think-aloud protocol of Student 1, we find how this writer labored to complete a particularly difficult

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[1] These negative metacomments were uttered when the researcher temporarily left the room, suggesting that Subject 20 might have been inhibited from expressing her discomfort while the researcher was within earshot. Her comments were nevertheless captured on audiotape.

sentence. The long t-unit contains three interjections expressing the writer's exasperation and frustration with the composing process.

STUDENT 1

14. um Movies Certain movies gi- um gives Certain movies .. um Certain . Certain movies ... Certain movies um .certain movies **haaay! [oooh!]** Certain movies **tsk!** ...... um ..... um Certain movies uhuh .. uh-huh Certain movies um provides Certain movies Certain movies have ah have lessons have moral lessons which are which which can which are which which ... hmm moral lessons which can add which .. Certain movies have moral lessons which which moral lessons which can give .. that can . that which .. which moral lessons which .. which can be helped **Aay!**

## 3.8 Elicited Idea

The overt result of a successful self-directed instruction, keyword probe, instance of brainstorming or pausing is an elicited idea, which is the least frequently reported composing behavior in Tagalog (1.79%). In the excerpt below, Student 23 uses a combination of keyword probe and brainstorming in Tagalog as she tries to elicit the English word *bribery* as an example of one negative side of Philippine life that is portrayed on television. Since she is unable to retrieve the English word for *lagay*, she settles for the word *violence* instead and writes it down as a note.

STUDENT 23

12. Negative, negative, negative um
13. *Ano ba 'yung negative?* [What else is negative?]
14. ***Ah, lagay* [Oh, *lagay*]**
15. *Ano 'yung lagay?* [What's *lagay* in English?]
16. Violence *Puwede na 'to* [This will do.]

## 4. Summary

Analysis of the students' think-aloud protocols revealed the eight composing behaviors verbalized in Tagalog, namely, brainstorming, lexical insertion/substitution, text and idea evaluation, metacomments, organizational decisions, self-directed instructions, elicited ideas. These composing behaviors represent the main processes of retrieving, organizing, and revising in writing. This means that the ESL student writers in the present study used Tagalog to generate ideas and evaluate the text. The results therefore support the findings reported by Lay (1982), that the L1 can facilitate ESL writing. The fact that

Tagalog and English share the same writing system is evidence that Lay's conclusions are not limited only to L1 Chinese writers, as Jones and Tetroe (1987) claimed.

With the student writers in the present study, the use of Tagalog was helpful in the areas of planning and revising the essay proper, as revealed in their think-aloud protocols. Specifically, the use of Tagalog enabled them to postpone low-level goals, such as word searches in the target language, in order to attend to higher level goals, such as sentence completion. The temporary use of Tagalog words in place of the elusive English word allowed the writers to move forward and later on return to the problematic text.

For instance, Student 4 verbalized the sentence *They gaya [imitate] their favorite actors* to help her move on with the writing task and return to the sentence later, when she can devote more time searching for the English word *imitate*. In another protocol, Student 13 verbalized the sentence *But if children are pinabayaan [neglected]*, which allowed her to continue and subsequently recast the sentence into *But if children are allowed by their guardians to watch any kind of program, the effect is really great*. Student 14 makes similar use of the L1 word *pangyayari* [current events], as she searches her mental lexicon for its English equivalent, without aborting the composing process.

Furthermore, the findings in the present study also support Friedlander's (1990) conclusion that the L1 is useful in information retrieval, and that translation can have a facilitative effect on L2 writing. In addition, the think-aloud protocols also revealed how topic familiarity affects how student writers address the writing prompt. For example, Student 23, who spent two hours on the writing task, revealed during her think-aloud that her difficulty with addressing the writing prompt stems from the fact that she did not watch television that much. These findings suggest that the composing processes of some ESL writers in the present study were influenced by factors related to vocabulary limitations and topic unfamiliarity.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study has shown that the bilingual nature of Filipino students is evident in the composing behaviors reported in their think-aloud protocols. Results indicate that the students' first language, Tagalog, indeed played more of a facilitative rather than interfering role as they wrote in English as a second language. Analysis of the transcripts of the students' verbalizations showed that Tagalog was often used when they brainstormed for ideas, evaluated their writing and the ideas they generated, and engaged in word searches. Tagalog was used to a lesser degree when they made organizational decisions, gave self-directed instructions, expressed metacomments pertaining to the writing process or written product, and elicited ideas. These results

indicate, too, that think-aloud protocol analysis can yield potentially useful insights when used as a method to investigate the writing process.

Since the participants' proficiency in the target language or the quality of the written essays was not measured, the results presented cannot be said to characterize the composing behaviors of skilled or novice L2 writers. The most that can be said is that the composing behaviors described in this study depict what Filipino first-year college students exhibit when they are tasked to write an in-class argumentative essay. Future studies would therefore be enriched by taking into account writers' proficiency in the target language and measuring text quality to complement the results obtained from a purely process-based analysis of L2 writing.

What the results do reveal is that L2 proficiency, especially in terms of vocabulary, appears to be an important factor in the L2 writers' success in accomplishing the writing task. This means that enriching the ESL writers' lexical resources may prove to be one way to help them more fully address the demands of composing in a second language. Finally, writing teachers need to reassess the role of the first language in the second language writing classroom, and explore the potential benefits that may be reaped when ESL learners tap their L1 as they plan, retrieve, generate, organize, evaluate, and revise their written products.

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