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**TASK REPRESENTATION, VOICE EXPRESSION AND
BELIEFS ABOUT WRITING: HOW DO THEY RELATE?**
**Representação da Tarefa, Expressão de Voz e Crenças sobre
Produção Textual: como esses aspectos se relacionam?**

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Abstract

Sociocognitive research has pointed out that the process of building a mental representation of an academic writing task differs from student to student depending on both cognitive and social factors. This study aims at examining whether two Letras undergraduates represented a writing task as inviting them to voice their own ideas about the topic. The process-tracing analysis shows that social, cognitive and affective factors influenced the students' writing process. The results point to the need to encourage our students to develop, express and sustain their own ideas about a given theme.

Key-words: *task representation; voice; writing process; beliefs.*

Resumo

Pesquisas de cunho sociocognitivo têm apontado que o processo de construir uma representação mental de uma tarefa acadêmica escrita difere de aluno para aluno dependendo de fatores cognitivos e sociais. Este estudo examina se dois graduandos de Letras representaram o enunciado de uma questão acadêmica discursiva como um convite à expressão de suas idéias em relação ao assunto. A análise do processo de elaboração do texto mostra que fatores sociais, cognitivos e afetivos influenciaram todo processo. Os resultados apontam a necessidade de encorajar nossos alunos para que estes desenvolvam, expressem e sustentem suas próprias idéias em relação a um tema.

Palavras-chave: *representação de tarefa; voz; processo de produção textual; crenças.*



1. Introduction

In order to build a mental representation of an academic writing task, writers go through an interpretive process, having the writing prompt as point of departure. According to sociocognitive-oriented research (e.g. Flower, 1990; Greene, 1995 & 1990; Nelson & Hayes, 1988), such representative process differs from writer to writer depending on cognitive (e.g. domain-specific knowledge, their ability to make suitable associations, synthesize source text information) as well as social factors (e.g. perception of the rhetorical situation, internalized schemas about school assignments, their familiarity with different kinds of academic writing task demands and also the degree of effort they are willing to make to handle the assigned task). As Flower (1990 a&b) pinpoints, writers construct their own mental representation of the task, they set a plan for action and depending on the flexibility of such a plan, writers' initial mental representation may be reformulated and so may their plan for action.

Getting socialized in academic discourse requires student writers to perceive various nuances of usual discourse practice which may not match their previous school experience. For example, discourse practices such as summarizing or reporting, per se, may be regarded inappropriate to the academic discourse community unless they are part of the writer's rhetorical purpose, that is, one in which these practices are not an end in themselves but a means to another end. Although novice student writers enter college mastering a wide range of skills such as being able to make effective use of the knowledge-displaying strategy, to summarize, to stay on topic while writing on trivial subjects, etc, they may fall short when required to engage in critical analytical thinking to transform their current knowledge on a given subject (cf. Flower, 1990b) and contribute to current discussions in their area of expertise. Some student writers not only fail to understand this kind of transition that is expected from them but also resist to changing their usual writing behaviors.

Making this transition to academic discourse may become a major hurdle to some student writers, mainly due to the tacit knowledge



that underlies academic discourse practices. Various researchers (Carmagnani, 1997; Greene, 1995 & 1993; Leffa, 1997; Pennycook, 1996) have recently addressed the conflicting roles of being both learners of a given disciplinary-content and being expected to make original contributions to ongoing discussion in that same given area.

Carmagnani (1997) suggests that it is possible to form authors, not only writers, in school if students learn how to take on the responsibility for what they say. Her view is aligned with Greene's (1990) discussion about the notion of authorship. The author claims that a crucial difference between expert and novice writers is their sense of *what* is appropriate in a given context, *why* certain rhetorical moves¹ might be more effective, *how* to achieve their goals and the use they make of source text information. Greene (1990) identifies three reasons why student writers appeal to authority: (1) to locate a faulty path, (2) to support a claim or (3) to be used as a source of content. The first is used when writers present a rival hypothesis to somebody's position and need to support their argument; the second occurs when they make an assertion and need to provide support for taking a given position and the third occurs when writers reproduce others' ideas instead of generating content themselves. Dourado (2000) adds that the way writers' represent a given writing task to themselves and the rhetorical moves they make also have a direct binding on weakening or strengthening their voices².

Most of the research on task representation has focused primarily, if not exclusively, on sociocognitive factors influencing student writers' representation of tasks. Some attention has been paid to cultural factors to a less extent. Spack (1997), for instance, examined the process of a Japanese college student getting socialized in the academy. A usually neglected factor in task representation and writing scholarship is the affective one. Few exceptions are Rose's (1984) and McLeod's (1987 & 1997) studies, which focus on writers' blocks and writing anxiety / attitudes / beliefs.

¹ Examples of rhetorical moves are extending or indicating a gap in previous research (for details, see Swales, 1990; Motta-Roth & Hedges, 1996).

² By voice here, I mean expressing and sustaining one's view about a given issue.

In light of these considerations, the present study aims at examining the following issues:

- What do the observed writers say about expressing their opinions?
- What do they actually do with regard to voice expression?
- How are their voices expressed in their written texts?
- What other factors might have encouraged them to contribute or suppress their voice expression?

2. Methodology

The student writers who participated in this experiment were two UFPB (Federal University of Paraíba) senior Letras students (English – Portuguese). Both of them were enrolled in an introductory course on Foreign Language Applied Linguistics. I was both teacher and researcher. Tricia and Brian were asked to write an essay on a topic given in class, namely, Contrastive Analysis. The task required them to interpret and synthesize a contrastive analyst's standpoint, which was fully transcribed in the writing prompt (see Appendix 1).

The participants were asked to address an audience of novice EFL instructors who were not familiar with theoretical concepts of second language acquisition research and theory. They were told to provide illustrations, define terms and justify their arguments to their audience.

Tricia and Brian were set at different schedules for an individual thinking aloud session which was audio and videotaped. They produced one draft each during the thinking aloud session. As they came up with unfinished drafts at the end of the thinking aloud session, they were allowed to write another version at home over the weekend, far removed from the inconvenience of the experimental situation. My goal was avoiding doubts about any kind of disturbing effect upon their writing.



Thinking aloud protocols are elicited by asking subjects to verbalize their thoughts while performing a task (for details on this or any other instrument of process-tracing research, see Smagorinsky, 1994). As part of their training to think aloud, Tricia and Brian watched a videotape of a thinking aloud session. Even though, to assure that they would actually think aloud, I stayed around most of the time during the session.

In addition to the thinking aloud session, some contextual specific questions were asked to Tricia and Brian, right after the completion of the task. The retrospective report consisted of questions, which were elaborated during my listening of their verbalizations. According to Erickson & Simon (1994:19), after the completion of an experimental writing task, much information is still in the writer's working memory and "can be directly reported or used as retrieval cues".

I also made use of long-term retrospective reports which were carried out after the completion of the term due to the kind of information I was searching for. I took for granted that Tricia and Brian would feel more comfortable to provide an evaluative opinion about the experiment. More specifically, I was interested in knowing whether they had actually read the source texts, whether the experience had been frustrating, whether it had somehow contributed to their academic lives and so on.

Another instrument of data collection used was stimulated recall. Like short-term retrospective reports, it also aims at eliciting information from writers to elucidate segments of their writing process. It consists of playing back selected segments of audio or videotapes to recall participants' retrospective impressions on them (DiPardo, 1994). In the context of this research, it became a valuable resource of information as I felt the need to resort to the student writers ten months after the data collection.

As a matter of fact both the stimulated recall and long-term retrospective reports were carried out simultaneously. What differentiated them, however, was the nature of the questions, as explained above.



Tricia and Brian were submitted to two general interviews. The first aimed at finding out the students' profile and their writing skill. The second aimed at giving them a chance to comment on their participation in the experiment. This one was carried out after the first thinking aloud session.

The process-tracing analysis of all these data was considered an appropriate method due to the very nature of the questions focused in this study. Also, such an analysis allowed for triangulation of data, contributing to the reliability of the results presented here.

To be as faithful as possible to the data gathered, I decided to transcribe fragments of the thinking aloud session, retrospective reports, stimulated recall and interviews in the language(s) they were produced. That is why the reader will come across segments in English, Portuguese or both.

3. Data Analysis and Discussion

To answer the first questions number one and two, I will make a comparative process-tracing analysis of what Tricia and Brian say about expressing their own view in the academy and what they really do as voice expression is regarded.

3.1. Sociocognitive Factors

As far as what Tricia and Brian say about expressing their opinions, the retrospective report throws some light into their beliefs about expressing their own opinion in the academy. It shows that both view school writing as a mere exercise of recitation or the means through which instructors know what one has learned about a given subject. This is the legacy Tricia and Brian brought with them from their years of schooling:

Researcher – Na sua opinião, *o que um professor espera de você* quando ele lhe dá uma tarefa como essa? Ou por que ele lhe dá uma tarefa como essa?



Researcher – In your opinion, what kind of expectation does a teacher hold when s/he assigns this kind of task? In other words, why does s/he assign such a task?

Tricia – Porque *para dar aula a gente precisa saber desse assunto*. Escrever porque a gente tá fazendo um curso de Letras então tem que saber escrever. *Para a senhora poder dar nota*.
Tricia – *Because we need to know this issue in order to teach it. Writing because we are majoring in Languages, therefore, we've got to know how to write.*

Brian – *Mostrar que aprendeu o assunto. Mostrar que entendeu a matéria dada.*

Brian – To display knowledge we have built along the term. To show you have understood a given subject

(long-term retrospective report)

Applebee (1984) has shown that high school graders play the role of students by getting to know teachers' demands and follow them accordingly. The excerpts below illustrate how Tricia and Brian play the role of students who are deferential to sources and play the school game by doing only what they are asked to do and nothing else.

Researcher – Como é que você lidava com a questão da crítica literária quando você escrevia seus trabalhos de literatura?

Researcher – How did you handle literary criticism in your lit papers?

Tricia – Ah..., a senhora vai ficar besta se eu disser.

Tricia – Hm... You'll get stunned if I tell you.

Researcher – Diga.

Researcher – Come on, say it!

Tricia – *Eu copiava um pedacinho daqui outro dali*. A senhora sabe eu não gosto de literatura, não entendo nada que aqueles caras dizem. Até que eu estudei um bando mas nunca vejo o que eles vêem.

Tricia – I used to gather a bit here another there. You know, I don't like literature. I don't understand a word of what they say. I even study it a lot but I never see what they do.

Researcher – E a sua opinião onde é que ficava?

Researcher – How about your opinion or point of view? Where did you bring it in?

Tricia – *E a senhora acha que eles querem saber nossa opinião? Eles querem mais que a gente repita o que os críticos dizem.*

Tricia – *Do you think they are interested in our opinion? They just want us to repeat what critics have already said.*

(long-term retrospective report)

Brian's reasons for not expressing his opinions were not very different:

Researcher – *Você geralmente dá sua opinião nos teus textos?*

Researcher – Do you usually give your opinion in your texts, I mean, what you think about a given theme?

Brian – *Geralmente eu não dou não.*

Brian – I usually don't.

Researcher – Por quê?

Researcher – Why not?

Brian – *Porque eu sei que os professores não querem nem saber. Eles querem que a gente repita o que ele ensinou. Lembra que te contei daquele professor que eu tive.*

Brian – For I know, our teachers don't care about it. They just want us to repeat what they have taught. Do you remember when I told you about that teacher I used to have?

Researcher – *Você não acha que dando enriquece o seu texto?*

Researcher – Don't you think that by providing and supporting your point of view you enrich your text?



Brian – Talvez. *Mas sempre que tento*, eles dizem isso ou aquilo, *acabei desistindo*.

Brian – Maybe. But whenever I try to do it, they say something. I ended up quitting!

(long-term retrospective report)

Another issue that might have contributed to their difficulty in voicing their position was unfamiliarity with this kind of task. For Ackerman (1990:177) when student writers “face an unfamiliar writing task, we can expect them to begin with what they know how to do as stable, productive first moves to make the unfamiliar more familiar”. The following segments reveal how unfamiliar and uncomfortable Tricia and Brian were with the assigned task.

Tricia – *E aqui é outra pergunta?* [apontando para a questão colocada logo em seguida da afirmação do Lado]

Tricia – And how about here, is it another question? [while pointing to the question strategically placed right after Lado’s statement to help them think about Lado’s point.]

Researcher – Não. Aqui é uma citação com o pensamento do Lado e aqui são duas questões p’ra você mencionar ao longo do teu texto.

Researcher – No, this is a citation expressing Lado’s thinking and here you have two questions to be answered along your text.

Tricia – [relê a questão] Ok. Acho que entendi ... *Então eu tenho que me basear na opinião do Lado?*

Tricia – [she rereads the prompt] Okay ... *I think I got it! So, do I have to base my text on Lado’s opinion?*

Researcher – Eu quero que você se posicione em relação a isso aí, concordando ou discordando, dando exemplos, etc.

Researcher – I’d like you to state your standpoint in relation to what Lado says, agreeing, disagreeing, giving examples, etc...

Tricia – *Pela experiência ser nova eu tô sem saber o que fazer.*
(teacher-student interaction preceding the thinking aloud session)

Tricia – . *Funny...* For the novelty of the experience, I am a bit lost here!

(teacher-student interaction preceding the thinking aloud session)

Researcher – Qual das três atividades foi a mais difícil?

Researcher – Which one of the three tasks was the most difficult for you?

Brian – Foi a primeira porque tinha que escrever falando e eu não sabia o que era isso. A segunda foi melhor, você sabe né o impacto, *a novidade sempre paralisa*.

Brian – The first one ... ‘cause I had to write while talking and I had no idea what it was all about. The second one was better, you know, the unexpected ... novelty, is always paralyzing!

Researcher – Essa primeira tarefa você entendeu como pedindo a você que fizesse um resumo. Você lembra por quê?

Researcher – This first task, you understood it as requiring you to write a summary. Do you remember why?

Brian – Não era para fazer isso não? Era p’ra compreender o texto e passar a compreensão?

Brian – Wasn’t I supposed to do that? Wasn’t I supposed to understand the text and display my comprehension of it?

Researcher – Não. Era para você reagir a esse pensamento do Lado. Você tem alguma idéia por que fez um resumo?

Researcher – Not exactly. You were supposed to respond to Lado’s thinking. Do you have any idea why you did a summary?

Brian – Não sei, *pode ter sido pelo fato de ser tudo diferente eu não entender direito*.

Brian – I don’t know, it might have been by the fact that everything was different, I might have got it all wrong!

(stimulated recall)

These excerpts reveal that both Tricia and Brian had their own beliefs about expressing their opinion in the academy. Tricia’s and



Brian's testimony provided them with a unique opportunity to reflect upon their writing experience. However, based on the evidence I have, I cannot draw any conclusion as regards the probable consequences, if any, of the experiment upon the students' writing skill.

Researcher – Você aprendeu alguma coisa para sua vida acadêmica com essa experiência ou com essas conversas que a gente teve? Teve alguma coisa que marcou positivamente?

Researcher – Have you learned anything for your academic life with this experience or with these talks we've had? Has anything brought any contribution to you?

Tricia – Eu acho que perdi o medo que tinha e fiquei mais segura p'ra escrever.

Tricia – I think I've let the fear of writing go and got more confident to write.

Brian – Sim. A partir de você é que eu comecei a ler falando alto e fazendo perguntas para mim mesmo. Antigamente eu lia calado e depois fazia um questionário para decorar ou entender a matéria. Mas eu não falava alto. Eu comecei a falar com você. Acho melhor porque eu escuto o que eu falo. E eu tenho um problema de falta de atenção. Se passar uma pessoa ali, eu desconcentro.

Brian – Yeah. Since then I started talking while writing and also to ask questions loud to myself. I used to read quietly, make a questionnaire to memorize and understand the topic. But I did not use to talk aloud. I started doing it with you and I like it for I can hear what I say. You know, I have a problem. It's difficult to get focused, if somebody passes by, I simply lose focus.

(long-term retrospective report)

The various methods used for gathering and analyzing the data provided a window on to what Tricia and Brian said about expressing their own positioning in the academy. Next, I show what they actually did along the thinking aloud session.

Regarding what they actually do with respect to voice expression, the data reveal individual differences in Tricia's and Brian's moves toward voicing their viewpoint. For instance, during the pre-writing stage, Tricia expressed her opinion about the two versions of Contrastive Analysis out loud:

A tal strong version eu acho que não dá p'ra ser tão categórico assim. Tem também a estória que as pessoas são diferentes, não é? Têm pessoas superdotadas e têm pessoas que não são dotadas. A dotada ela vai ter capacidade suficiente de dessa diferença entre as línguas tirar de letra.

The so called 'strong version', I think you can't be so rigid. There is also the issue that people are different. There are gifted and non-gifted people. The gifted one will have enough skill to overcome language barriers easily.

(teacher-student interaction preceding the thinking aloud session)

Nevertheless, Tricia did not recall this point later during the thinking aloud session itself:

... e ... finally ... I will ... não ... I intend ... to express my personal point of view ... [vê as horas] ... Nossa! ... não escrevi nada ainda ... to express my personal point of view, my poor personal point of view [sorri]... lógico que não vou colocar isso... contrastive analysis ...

...and ... finally ... I will ... no ... I intend ... to express my personal point of view ... [looks at the time] ... Gosh! ... I haven't written anything yet ... to express my personal point of view, my poor personal point of view [laughs]... of course, I will not write this down... contrastive analysis ...

(thinking aloud protocol)

This fragment of Tricia's thinking aloud protocol shows that Tricia planned to place her opinion at the very end of her essay. The most I can do is speculating on probable reasons that might have guided her decision to do so. First, it might have been a deferential attitude to



authorities. Second, it may have been lack of confidence in her own view. Third, she might have learned to wrap up a discussion in such a way, which is very possible following the typical five-theme essay (legacy of the current-traditional rhetoric). No matter what reason she might have had for placing her opinion last in the discussion, her negative evaluation of it is compelling!

Brian, on the other hand, only verbalizes his ‘disagreement’, or perhaps, ‘agreement’ with Lado’s viewpoint once in his thinking aloud protocol: [‘... I use the word ‘must’ ... as a kind of obligation ... but it is in relation to Lado’s view ... for he is a landmark in contrastive analysis ... I use ‘must’ but there are other issues ... I agree with him disagreeing at the same time ... grammatical structure.’]

What we get in his written text is neither a discussion of what aspects he agrees with nor the ones he disagrees with. Although we know that in general terms many things that are said in verbal protocols are not included in written texts, we cannot deny the fact that there is something that Lado says that Brian does not agree with, but we never get to know what it really is. When asked about it, Brian was unable to realize that, in fact, he did not allow his reader to know in which aspects he did not disagree with Lado’s opinion.

Researcher – Qual a sua opinião sobre a Análise Contrastiva?
Researcher – What is your opinion about contrastive analysis?

Brian – Eu concordo com o Lado que quando a gente compara as duas línguas a gente já tem uma idéia onde os alunos vão ter dificuldade. Mas eu discordo com algumas coisas que ele diz aqui, como eu disse no texto.

Brian – I agree with Lado when he points out that by comparing both languages we’ll spot problematic areas. However I disagree with a couple of things he says in his text as I mentioned in the text.

(retrospective report)

As a matter of fact, it was only later that Brian explicitly disagreed with Lado’s opinion, as it will be seen next.

With respect to the third question, concerning voice expression both in the students' drafts and final written versions, I shift the previous focus from process to product. As shown by the protocol analysis, Tricia chose to voice her opinion last in her essay: "Finally, I intend to express my personal point of view". As she did not manage to finish her draft during the thinking aloud session, she only expressed her viewpoint in the version she wrote at home:

"For concluding, my personal point of view, I agree with Lado when he defends the differences between L1 and L2 and also when he describes the difficulty of the learners. Because each language has a particular peculiarity, forms and meanings. Thus, based on this principle, we can understand the differences between two languages which contributes to the difficulty for learners". [sic]

(final written version)

At first sight, one could read her opinion as an attempt to corroborate the importance of pinpointing similarities and differences across languages. A closer look, however, suggests an alternative reading which would recall the fact that earlier in her text she had only mentioned the strong version of Contrastive Analysis, leaving the weak version unmentioned. Could it then be said that she agrees with the strong version of Contrastive Analysis? When asked about such a mismatch of verbal and written opinion, she sounds as holding a firm position, one that is in favor of the weak version of Contrastive Analysis:

Researcher – Você afinal concorda com a versão da Análise Contrastiva que diz que diferenças podem gerar dificuldades ou com aquela que afirma que diferenças geram dificuldades?
 Researcher – After all, do you agree with the version that holds that differences between mother tongue and second language lead to difficulties or the one that postulates that differences between L1 and L2 might cause difficulties?

Tricia – *Com aquela que fala que pode gerar dificuldades. Por quê? Aí tá diferente?*

Tricia – With the one that says differences might cause difficulties. Why? Is it different there?



Researcher – Olha só! O que você acha?

Researcher – Take a look! What do you think?

Tricia – Acho que me enrolei na hora e não ficou claro né?

Tricia – I think it's really confusing, it's not clear, is it?

(stimulated recall)

Unlike Tricia, Brian did not even attempt to voice his viewpoint. As it has been mentioned before, for him, writing in the academy is a matter of displaying knowledge and in this game, instructors are not interested in students' viewpoints.

It was only after my insisting on the importance of this critical stance was he persuaded to do it that he decided to include his point of view. Thus, the following excerpt illustrates that Brian recognizes the importance of Contrastive Analysis as a tool to predict difficulties EFL students are likely to face in their learning process:

The contributions of CA in relation to the language teaching and learning are important due to the analysis of difficulties faced by the students and how instructors can react about that difficulties. In my opinion, Robert Lado's point of view have some relevant aspects and I agree with him in some parts But language for me is more than to follow right structures and avoid mistakes. The teach and learn a language is a dynamic process. [sic]

(Brian's final written version)

It seems, then, that as important as motivating student writers to voice their critical view on a subject matter is helping them through the process of developing their own view as they manipulate various sources and also through the process of presenting such a view in ways that conform to academic demands.

The focus of the questions discussed so far foregrounds only the sociocognitive factors that permeated Tricia's and Brian's sayings and doings with respect to voicing their opinion in the academy. I would like to turn, now, to a still neglected aspect in the area of writing – the

affective dimension, which underlies the students' entire writing process and which, to my view, also affects their voice expression.

3.2. Affective Factors

Mandler's (1972) theory of emotion encompasses two major factors, namely, physical and cognitive; that is, when emotion occurs physical reactions of various intensities (e.g. trembling, heart beat acceleration, a knot in the stomach, etc.) take place and it is likely to be cognitively interpreted as either positive or negative.

Tracing such physical reactions is as subtle as tracing cognitive operations. Only those observable ones are possible to be discussed here but one must be cognizant of the fact that they are likely not to have been the only existing ones. This section presents and discusses Tricia's and Brian's physical reactions, providing us with a portray of their emotional state towards writing in the academy. It does not intend to present a thorough view of the affective domain though. Conversely, it aims at arguing for the need of further empirical evidence to include the affective domain in current writing scholarship.

A record of the students' observable reactions was possible by videotaping their thinking aloud session and by eliciting their perceptions about these sessions. As their perceptions were spontaneous rather than stimulated, they are not as complete as they could be, but they do show how conscious students were about some of their physical reactions.

Stuttering and laughing at ease signaled Tricia's discomfort levels during the first thinking aloud session. Her accurate perception of her discomfort was confirmed by some of her comments during the thinking aloud session: ['... and I want ...see? When I get nervous I start laughing... I stutter ... and ... can't stop laughing ... I lack confidence thoroughly]

Brian's physical reactions were even more prominent and included shaking his legs uninterruptedly, sighing at the end of each



produced sentence, wiping out his nose continuously, holding his pen tightly, changing it from one hand to another and placing it here and there. Interestingly, his comments preceded his physical reactions: [‘ I have a problem. I don’t like writing, I get anxious. You’ll see...it’ll get a time when I will be able to write no more. You’ll see!.’]. By now, the reader might have noticed the amount of problems Brian acknowledges having! His comments somehow sound as if Brian were anticipating discomfort, apprehension or even a writing block. His anticipation is very suggestive of some degree of apprehension on part of the student. In the remaining part of this essay, I aim at speculating about probable reasons for such an emotional behavior.

As Brian seemed far more anxious than Tricia even in class, I do believe there might have been social and cultural aspects encouraging the development of his apprehensive state such as (a) age group – both he and I were of the same age; (b) contextual factor– they were the only students in this group; (c) social status – being a university professor in the Northeast of Brazil still means holding a respectable and powerful position, mainly for most students coming from the country; (d) cultural bias – because he is a man, it might have been embarrassing for him to show his shortcomings and difficulties to a female instructor of his age. Yet, his comment on this issue does not support such interpretation:

Researcher– As aulas só comigo eram estressante não eram?

Researcher– Having classes with me without Pat was sort of stressing, wasn’t it?

Brian – Não porque eu gostava da aula e eu adoro o assunto. *Com a Tricia, ela me ajudava porque aí eu não era o centro de atenções.* Eu gostava da aula por isso não era estressante, mas com ela eu escutava a opinião dela também.

Brian – No, not exactly for I liked your classes and I love the topic. With tricia in class was good for she helped me and you did not put the focus on me. Yeah, I liked your classes, that’s why it was not stressing, but with both of us in class I could hear her opinion too.

(interview)



Dweck and Wortman (1982) claim that writers' attitude toward their writing has a direct binding upon their comfort levels. They state that some "individuals are not only more negative about themselves and about their performance, but they also put the two together and view their poor performance as resulting from their lower competence" (:112). Thus, being able to separate performance from overall competence seems a crucial issue to keep one's comfort levels in balance. This means that voicing negative self-evaluations or conceiving of one's writing failure conspire in favor of high levels of anxiety as Rose (1984) suggests. He noted that *high-blockers* verbalized more negative evaluations of their work than their counterparts. The author advocates that focus on the self rather than the task may lead writers to cultivate considerable feelings of anxiety.

Insecurity was a key word used by Tricia (in the questionnaire) to refer to her attitude toward writing, as the following example illustrates: ['I feel awfully insecure for I wish I could write well and effectively but, unfortunately, I don't. I hope my writing gets better']. This emotional state seems to be rooted in her school experience and on her unawareness of the criteria through which students' papers are assessed ['I don't know what happens to my writing. Whenever I think it's good, it's not. That's why I get insecure. Perhaps my previous teachers haven't helped me that much. In fact, some only criticized my writing rather than helping me improve it'].

According to McLeod (1987), allowing students to know the measuring devices whereby their writing is evaluated helps decreasing uncertainty regarding writing assessment. Strongman (1996) adds that uncertainty is a core aspect of anxiety and as such has deserved special attention in most research on anxiety.

The overall analysis of Brian's questionnaire on his writing skills reveals inconsistency when he evaluates his writing as being good, on one hand, but on the other, when justifying it, he says he does not like what he writes.



Como você avaliaria a sua escrita seguindo a escala abaixo:

() *excelente* () *muito boa* (x) *boa* () *ruim*

How would you evaluate your writing following the scale below?

() *excellent* () *very good* (x) *good* () *poor*

Justifique sua resposta:

Porque eu não gosto do que eu escrevo.

Explain your response:

For I don't like what I write.

Other responses show that he does not enjoy writing much and that he usually feels tired while writing. *Feeling tired* or *not feeling good* were the two most common excuses offered by Brian to postpone the writing activity as the following excerpt discloses. [‘The point is that I don’t feel good today. I’ve got a problem. If you feel like setting another day there are no problems. Just set it’]

4. Conclusion

Tricia’s and Brian’s view of writing as an evaluative rather than a learning tool, their deference to source text ideas, their playing the role of students by only doing what they believed was expected from them, their underscoring of their own opinion, and, most importantly, their lack of self-confidence lead us to raise questions about the nature of writing in the academy and about what we expect student writers to do. Do we expect them to repeat what others have said? Do we expect them to display domain specific knowledge per se? Do we expect them to think critically about a given topic and make effective use of source text information? To what extent are we willing to help them build their own opinions about a topic? It seems that if our pedagogical practices value critical analytical thinking, what we should then do is initiating them into academic discourse so as to empower them to express, rather than suppress, their opinion in acceptable ways.

The process-tracing analysis suggests that despite Tricia and Brian having represented the task as requiring them to voice their opinions about Lado's viewpoint and about the contributions of Contrastive Analysis to foreign language teaching, social factors (e.g. previous school writing experiences, beliefs about school writing), cognitive ones (e.g. domain specific knowledge) and affective ones (e.g. self-confidence and lack of emotional control) had a direct binding upon their choices and decisions while writing.

At the heart of literacy research lies the importance of raising learners' consciousness about the beliefs they hold about schooling, knowledge, learning styles and so on. Perhaps, by being encouraged to reflect upon such issues, learners may develop more successful approaches to learning, writing, reading, etc. Flower (1990a) suggests that writing instructors should help students develop a contextualized form of knowledge which she calls *strategic*, which empowers them to reflect upon their rhetorical purpose, goals they set to themselves and the appropriate strategies they should employ to achieve those goals.

In sum, this study points to the importance of leading students to reflect upon their writing process, their difficulties, beliefs, the strategies they rely upon, and also their emotional control when facing a complex sociocognitive task like writing. Moreover, it supports previous research (Flower, 1990; Ackerman, 1990) that has identified task representation as a constructive process that triggers diverse plans for action and as such deserves further investigation. Finally, if we are willing to pursue factors that have a binding upon EFL writers' task representation and voice expression, we should also turn our attention to cultural issues such as the extent to which Brazilians are actually encouraged to speak and value their own minds.

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Appendix 1

Write an essay in which you present and explain your understanding of:

- “[Students] will never be ready to struggle to pronounce things in different sound units, different intonation, different rhythm and stress, different constructions, and even different units of meaning unless they realize that this is exactly what’s involved in learning a foreign language” (Lado, 1957:08).

- How does this statement express Lado’s opinion about the relevance of Contrastive Analysis for foreign language teaching. Mention some contributions of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis to foreign language teaching.

- Your essay should be based on the background readings, class discussions, and your own ideas about the topic. The essay should be addressed to an *audience of novice EFL teachers* who are not familiar with theoretical concepts of second language acquisition research and theory. Finally, make sure to provide support for your ideas.

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