

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 BACKGROUND OF CHINESE NON-ENGLISH MAJOR WRITERS' BLOCKS:

It is not a great secret that the majority of college students dislike writing; in fact, some of non-English major students hate it. Why is this so? What makes writing so unpopular? Some students dislike English writing because in their minds, English writing assignment, even a short passage of only 100 words “wastes” a lot of their time. They write passively. An important reason for such a negative attitude towards English writing is ignorance of its importance. Ji (2001) points out that most Chinese college students hold a false belief that learning a foreign language means learning grammatical rules, remembering words and memorizing sentence organizations and patterns. They take it for granted that if one can remember a large number of English words and show a fair performance in reading, he has learned the language well. Therefore, they spend a lot of time in and out of class learning grammatical rules, memorizing word-by-word and reading in English. Not enough attention has been paid to the development of their productive skills, such as writing.

On the other hand, there are some students who have a positive or indistinct attitude towards English writing, but they are somewhat afraid of writing consciously or unconsciously. To a great extent, this is due to the complicatedness of EFL writing and their limited knowledge of the nature of EFL writing. As we have discussed in the first chapter, writing in a foreign language is a complicated process and to produce effective English writing involves various aspects of knowledge. In addition, an inappropriate teaching approach especially teachers' feedback or response sometimes discourage students from learning writing effectively.

Furthermore, the problems about students' writing content, Zhang (1995) shows that the emptiness of content is the most prominent and conspicuous problem in Chinese college students' EFL writing. Chen (2001) also indicates the same problem

based on his own writing experience. How to unearth the content of a written work, which embodies students' thought, remains the biggest problem in EFL writing teaching. Researches abroad also confirm this point: The process of writing for Chinese students and other foreign students, as well as American students is quite similar, which experiences the same process from creating, prewriting, to shaping or writing, and finally to completing or rewriting. Yet, Chinese students need to pay more attention to the finding of topics and the richness of content. They further point out that another problem is the lack of topical focus in most Chinese students' EFL writing; i.e. the layout of the whole piece of writing is too wide and students are not good at extending the topic by using details. More importantly, the difficulties Chinese students face stems not from the negative influence of Chinese writing rhetoric, but from the lack of writing experiences. This result shows that the ability to deepen or enrich the content of English writing does not depend on the students' Chinese writing ability and it can be cultivated through writing classes. The key to solve these problems is to find effective teaching approaches. Traditional form-focused writing approaches pay too much attention to word, sentence, paragraph and the form of a model prose, and therefore ignore the students' initiatives in enriching the content of a piece of writing.

The problem in students' writing form is that many teachers hold the belief that problems of form should be solved by a strict form-focused approach to writing. But researchers and linguists criticize this widely used approach taken by writing teachers in most colleges and universities. Actually, to solve the problems of form in students' writing, a holistic approach is generally recommended. Practice has shown us that traditional methods cannot be effective in solving this kind of problem. Teachers need more scientific guidance in ELT theory such as error analysis and individual differences in L2 acquisition, and then they can apply a more effective writing approach to teaching practice. Another problem in the form is the widespread Chinglish phenomenon. Sometimes teachers even find it difficult to evaluate a piece of writing by a Chinese student writer. There are no spelling or grammar mistakes in the writing, yet it cannot be judged as good or excellent. According to Knoy, T. (2000), poor competence in both the mother tongue and the target language, and the

negative transfer are contributing factors in students' failure in producing native-like writing.

## 2.2 REVIEW OF LEARNING STRATEGIES:

### 1. Metacognitive Strategies in EFL Writing

In EFL contexts, language production skills are particularly important because students' acquisition of writing competence is crucial to their success in academic settings (O' Malley & Chamot, 1990). Although there are a small number of metacognitive strategies training research, few studies have examined how strategies applied to EFL writing. As Kasper said, "corresponding metacognitive research in writing had been sorely lacking, let alone its training practice." (O' Malley, 2001) Much recent researching interest in writing has concentrated on identification of the writing process and analysis of discourse, but very little has been reported about the investigations of instruction in metacognitive strategies for EFL writing.

O'Malley conducted in 1985 an experimental study to determine whether strategy instruction in a natural classroom setting would result in improved learning. Seventy-five students of non-English major college students were randomly divided into three groups: the metacognitive group, the cognitive group and the control group. The metacognitive group received combined instruction on metacognitive, cognitive, and social affective strategies; the cognitive group received instruction on cognitive and social affective strategies alone. Strategies were combined with different language tasks: vocabulary, listening and speaking. The students received instruction and practice in the use of learning strategies for fifty minutes daily for eight days. Results of statistical analyses on the speaking task indicated that differences among the three groups were statistically significant on the post-test. The metacognitive group scored higher than the cognitive group, which scored higher than the control group.

Kasper (1997) made an empirical study of 120 ESL students at intermediate and advanced level, assessing the relationship between metacognitive person, task and strategy knowledge and the writing performance of EFL students with both quantitative and qualitative data, which supported the hypothesis that there is a significant positive correlation between EFL students' metacognitive growth, along and across the three components of metacognitive knowledge, and their actual performance on a final writing assessment. Her study suggests that it is especially critical to design activities which target and develop students' knowledge of efficient writing strategies, and that instruction designed to strengthen students' metacognitive models should be introduced early on as an integral part of EFL writing instruction.

In China, Ji Kangli (2002) researched training in Metacognitive strategies. The researcher trained 62 students' of Qinghua University in four metacognitive strategies: becoming aware of learning processes, self-evaluation, establishment of objectives, and planning. The findings showed that most trainees' metacognitive awareness and ability to use those strategies had been enhanced. The conclusion is that metacognitive strategy training is feasible and the training should be incorporated into regular language teaching. Ji's research differs from the previously reviewed research in the ways of data collection. In his research, the data was not from tests, but from open questionnaire, interview, reports, and feedback from students.

Recent research which applied metacognitive theory to writing was conducted by Du Aihong (2004) who conducted a study on metacognitive strategy training in College English writing. In her study, 269 college students non-English majors were divided into three groups: the metacognitive group, the cognitive group and control group. The metacognitive group received metacognitive strategy training in writing class; the cognitive group received instruction on cognitive strategies only and the control group received no strategy training in writing. Results of statistical analyses showed that both the metacognitive group and the cognitive group made significant improvement in their writing performance. This suggests it is effective for English learners to learn and practice language learning strategies to improve their writing.

## 2. Cognitive strategies in EFL writing

In cognitive theory, language production is seen as an active process of meaning construction and expression. Anson (1989) indicates that language production can be divided into three stages. He points out that although the stages of comprehension and production are analogous (though in reverse order), in fact important differences exist in terms of the underlying mental processes. In addition, as Vollmer and Sang (1983) have indicated, greater knowledge of syntax is required in production than in comprehension, which again suggests that language reception and production are not mirror images of each other.

The three stages of language production Anson identifies are:

- (1) **Construction**, in which the speaker/writer selects communication goals and identifies appropriate meanings. In writing, this phase is termed planning, and comprises the prewriting stage (Hayes & Flower, 1980).
- (2) **Transformation**, in which language rules are applied to transform intended meanings into the form of the message. In writing, both composition and revision take place during this stage.
- (3) **Execution**, in which the message is expressed in its audible or observable form. In writing, this stage corresponds to the actual physical process of producing the text, whether handwritten or typed.

These three stages can be recursive after the initial communication goal is established. That is, once a speaker or writer has decided what to communicate, he or she may go back and forth between the processes of construction, transformation, and execution as the message is developed.

In construction, an individual decides what to say. This decision is based on the goals the speaker or writer has for language production. Once a person has decided on the goals to be served through language generation, the second step is to select the facts to be expressed. This entails a search through declarative knowledge and identification of information appropriate to the functional goal established. The third step in the construction stage is to decide how to structure the information selected.

In structuring the information to be expressed, the speaker or writer uses various types of knowledge, including discourse knowledge, understanding of the audience, and sociolinguistic rules. Discourse knowledge involves the ability to call up various types of schemata, such as story grammars if the language to be generated is a narrative, or event scripts, if the language will be used to participate in a sequence of habitual actions, such as a service encounter in which a purchase is made. Event scripts begin as plans, which consist of knowledge of how goals are achieved. In a foreign language context, the event script may have developed somewhat differently, as plans originally developed in the native language may have to be modified linguistically and conceptually, even though the goals may remain the same.

In writing, organization at both the sentence and the text level is an important contributor to the successful communication of meaning and enhance to the quality to the written product (Gagne, 1985). At the sentence level, cohesive devices signal relationships within the sentence and refer back to previously mentioned ideas. Gagne (1985) points out that different amounts of declarative knowledge are used for different types of cohesive devices. For example, cohesive links using syntactical markers such as pronoun referents or conjunctions require procedural rather than declarative knowledge. On the other hand, cohesive links using lexical markers such as synonyms and those using event scripts require that the appropriate schemata be available in declarative knowledge. At the text level, degree of coherence, or the way in which the entire text is structured logically, differentiates novice and expert writers. Difficulties in coherence may be due to lack of sufficient procedural knowledge (how to organize text) or lack of declarative knowledge (the store of relevant information to organize) (Gagne, 1985). Thus, knowledge of various levels of discourse is essential in the construction or planning stage of writing.

In transformation, the second stage of language production, the speaker or writer who has decided what to say must convert the information into meaningful sentences. Anson (1989) cites a number of studies of oral production in which pauses occur at phrase boundaries, indicating, in his view, that language is generated in phrases. These language-generation production systems are, like other types of procedural

knowledge, goal-oriented IF-THEN statements that constitute a program for a given action to take place when certain conditions exist (Gagne, 1985).

In writing, the transformation stage has been termed *translation* (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Gagne, 1985). Translation refers here to converting intentions or plans into a mental representation rather than to rendering equivalent meanings between one language and another, as translation is generally thought of in foreign language acquisition. During translation, the writer forms a representation of the goals, ideas, and organization plan developed in the construction or organization stage. This mental representation consists of sentences and sentence fragments that will be written down during the third stage, execution. While executing the written product, the writer may pause and return to the previous stages to alter or make new plans as the writing progresses. Expert writers focus on the merging meaningfulness of their text, while young and novice writer's focus on mechanical aspects such as handwriting, spelling, or grammar. Gagne (1985) points out that during the translation stage it is useful for a writer to have automatic mechanical skills of this sort so that attention can be freed for developing the cohesion, coherence, and knowledge of audience that improve the quality of writing.

The reviewing or revising process in writing is included by Anson (1985) as part of transformation, his second stage of language production. In the reviewing process, the writer undertakes two activities---evaluation and revising (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Gange, 1985). The writer first evaluates what has been produced in terms of the original goals set, thus returning to the first stage of the writing process (construction). Then the writer returns to the second stage (transformation) and revises the written product in light of the evaluation.

### 3. Social strategies in EFL writing

Writing has generally been used in College English class as a tool for practicing and reinforcing grammar and expression. The traditional method employed in writing is usually like this: teachers define the topic for writing; students are asked to write a

composition; teachers correct their papers; students put them to sleep in their folders, never reflecting upon corrections or comments.

There are numerous other ways of infusing social/affective strategies into the writing classroom from initial pre-writing stages through the final product and publication. During process writing students can be involved in the construction of narratives on topics of their interest. They can share their writing with peers, who comment on the piece and ask questions or offer suggestions and encouragement. Learners can brainstorm in small groups for appropriate topics, discuss possible vocabulary or directions for a first draft, or provide more detailed feedback (praise for effective passages; questions to elicit greater specificity or alacrity; or suggestions for other directions the writer might take). They can also work in pairs or groups to edit or proofread each other's drafts.

Generally speaking, students are interested in reading their classmates' papers as they are working on the same topic. Therefore, they are more often than not very careful in finding out others' mistakes and at the same time they can avoid or correct similar mistakes in their own writing, although their attention might mainly focus on surface grammatical errors. Students also learn to respect others by offering constructive comments without hurting others' feeling. Definitely, this is a suggestive method for College students to use in writing class.

### 2.3 REVIEW OF TEACHING APPROACHES:

Thanks to the development of ESL and EFL teaching theories and practices, many writing teachers working in colleges and universities have realized the defect of traditional methods and have come to change their teaching concepts.

Traditionally, we used to believe that 1) teachers should assign the topics and students learned to write only when teachers gave writing assignments. 2) Teachers were the only readers for the students' writing. 3) A major objective of teaching writing was to correct the mechanical aspects of students' writing: grade the spelling, grammar and punctuation. 4) Students were allowed to write one draft only. 5)

Students should learn the basic skills (e.g. spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization) FIRST before they wrote. 6) Writing was a solitary activity. 7) The writing process meant outlining and turning out the final product. 8) Students should begin a new piece every time they wrote.

Now, we know that 1) Students need to be taught how to write and be allowed to write on topics of their own choosing. 2) Students need to write for authentic audiences—for their peers, for their teachers, for their parents, for distant audiences. 3) Teachers should look first at the content of the writing, and then provide corrective feedback. 4) Students should be encouraged to write as many drafts as necessary. 5) Basic skills and writing could proceed simultaneously. 6) Students should be allowed to either write by themselves or interact with their peers and the teacher about their writing. 7) The writing process involves more than one step: data collection, prewriting, drafting, rewriting, and sharing. 8) To learn to write well, students should be encouraged to work on the same piece of writing as often as needed. (Tang, F. Li-xing, 2002). A review of some writing approaches which collected from related references may give us a light on how to teach EFL writing more effectively.

#### 1. The controlled-to-free approach

The controlled-to-free approach in writing is sequential: Students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically by, for instance, changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular. They might also change words or clauses or combine sentences. They work on given material and performed strictly prescribed operations on it. With these controlled compositions, it is relatively easy for students to write a great deal yet avoid errors. Because the students have a limited opportunity to make mistakes, the teacher's job of marking papers is quick and easy. Only after reaching a high intermediate or advanced level of proficiency are students allowed to try some free compositions, in which they express their own ideas.

This approach stresses three features: grammar, syntax and mechanics. It emphasizes accuracy rather than fluency or originality. The focus of this approach is very much on the sentence level grammar, holding the belief that sentences are the building blocks of discourse, and that discourse is created by fitting one building block on to the next. Such an approach is consistent with sentence-level structural linguistics and bottom-up processing. However, it is not consistent with emerging ideas in discourse analysis. And the bigger defect of this approach is that while controlled writing tasks give students the opportunity to produce a great deal of almost error-free writing and also to focus their attention on troublesome grammatical and syntactic features, they provide only reinforcement and not a total writing program. This is, to a great extent, due to the situation in which writing is only treated as an assistant of speech teaching, instead of a necessary language skill highly required at that time. Raimes (1983) points out that in the 1950s and early 1960s, the audio-lingual approach dominated second-language learning. Speech was primary and writing served to reinforce speech in that it stressed mastery of grammatical and syntactic forms. ESL teachers developed techniques to move students towards this mastery. No wonder the so-called writing teaching was essentially writing-to-learn activities, not real learning-to-write activities.

## 2. Traditional text-based writing approach

This traditional approach to writing is one representative of the product approach focusing on form. Teachers, who focus on form often present authoritative texts for students to imitate or adapt, and are likely to use textbooks which give a good range of models. They will also tend to see errors as something that they have a professional obligation to correct and, where possible, eliminate. In such a context, one of the teacher's main roles will be to instill notions of correctness and conformity.

Even though this approach realizes the importance of text model and language input for second or foreign language learners, it does not create enough freedom for students to write. Meanwhile, with the strict attitude towards errors by students, to

teach writing using this approach is more like writing to learn rather than learning to write. With hands and mind tied up, how can students become real writers adept in another Language?

### 3. Free-writing approach

Some teachers and researchers have stressed quantity of writing rather than quality. They have, that is, approached the teaching of writing by assigning vast amounts of free writing on given topics, with only minimal correction of error. The emphasis in this approach is that intermediate-level students should put content and fluency first and not worry about form. Once ideas are down on the page, grammatical accuracy, organization, and the rest will gradually follow.

To emphasize fluency even more, some ESL/EFL teachers begin many of their classes by asking students to write freely on any topic without worrying about grammar and spelling for five or ten minutes. At first, students find this very difficult. They have to resort to writing sentences like, "I cannot think of anything to write." As they do this kind of writing more and more often, however, some find that they write more fluently and that putting words down on paper is not so frightening. The teachers do not correct these short pieces of free writing: they simply read them and perhaps comment on the ideas the writers have expressed. Alternatively, some students might volunteer to read their own aloud to the class. Concern for "audience" and "content" are seen as important in this approach, especially since the free writings often revolve around objects that the students are interested in, and those subjects then become the basis for other more focused writing tasks. Contrary to the controlled-to-free and traditional text-based writing approach, this approach provides students with a wide space for writing in which students can express themselves freely. The concept of 'practice makes perfect' has been fully developed and put into use without any hesitation. But this approach ignores the fact that though most college students' (non-English major) English level has reached intermediate level, it does not mean that their writing ability has risen up to the same level. Nearly all the students except those

who studied in English or bilingual middle school, never received systematic writing lectures before entering college or university. Therefore, it is too difficult for students to face such a situation without any instruction. Without certain language input, how can students of foreign languages produce effective output? Additionally, this approach cannot meet the demand of examinations. Until now, seldom does any examination allow students to write so freely. This approach may be effective in helping students enrich writing content, taking audience and purpose into consideration, yet it cannot solve the problem encountered in the aspect of form for those students with elementary-level writing ability.

#### 4. The paragraph-pattern approach

Instead of accuracy of grammar or fluency of content, the paragraph-pattern approach stresses another feature--organization. Students copy paragraphs, analyze the form of model paragraphs, and imitate model passages. They put scrambled sentences into paragraph order; they identify general and specific statements: they choose or invent an appropriate topic sentence; they insert or delete sentences. This approach is based on the principle that in different cultures people construct and organize their communication with each other in different ways. So even if students organize their ideas well in their first language, they still need to see, analyze, and practice the particularly "English" features of a piece of writing.

The strength of this approach is that teachers can guide students' writing from the higher level of paragraphs instead of fixating on the vocabulary and sentence structure. Yet, organization is only one side of writing. A good knowledge of it is not enough to produce an acceptable piece of writing. The biggest defect of this approach is that the students are still put in a position of focusing on text models or exercises, instead of being activated or encouraged to write, acting as real writers.

#### 5. The grammar-syntax-organization approach

Some teachers have stressed the need to work simultaneously on more than one of the features in' the production of a written work. Writing, they say, cannot be seen as composed of separate skills, which are learned one by one. So they devise writing tasks that lead students to pay attention to organization while they also work on the necessary grammar and syntax. For instance, to write a clear set of instructions on how to operate a calculator, the writer needs more than the appropriate vocabulary. He/she needs the simple forms of verbs; an organizational plan based on chronology; sequence words like "first", "then", "finally"; and perhaps even sentence organizations like "When, Then". During discussion and preparation of the task, all these are reviewed or taught for the first time.

The strength of this approach is that it links the purpose of a piece of writing to the form that is needed to convey the message. Students can see the connection between what they are trying to write (e.g. an instruction of using a calculator) and what they need to write it (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, syntax, conjunction, organization etc.). With a clear goal in mind, plus teachers' instruction, students may be able to learn to write more effectively. Moreover, this approach begins to look at writing from a discourse perspective, taking cohesion of a text into consideration. The defect remains that this approach still sticks to the form of a written work instead of focusing on the content.

## 6. The communicative approach

The communicative approach stresses the purpose of a piece of writing and its audience due to the understanding that writing in real life is usually undertaken in response to a demand of some kind. For adults, the demand may arise from academic studies, professional responsibilities, or from such social roles as friend, purchaser, enquirer, complainant, or counselor. Students may have any of these present or possible future purposes for writing in English. Moreover, in every case message must be communicated to a real audience.

Writing in the English-language classroom can become unreal if it is only ever

produced for one reader, the teacher, and if its purpose is limited to enabling the teacher to assess the correctness of the linguistic forms used. Under these conditions, students are encouraged to set up contexts for their writing and motivate themselves to write appropriately for the imaginary readers. It is far more motivating for them if their writing can become genuine pieces of communication with real audiences such as other students, visitors, the local newspaper, organizations and soon. Then they can think carefully about the identifiable and particular context, which will determine the exact message and style of their written communication.

Proponents of this approach argue that student writers should be encouraged to behave like writers in real life and to ask themselves the crucial questions about purpose and audience:

- 1) Why am I writing this? (Purpose)
- 2) Who will read it? (Audience/Reader)

Traditionally, the teacher alone has been the audience for student writing. However, some feel that writers do their best when writing is truly a communicative act, with a writer writing for a real reader. Teachers using the communicative approach, therefore, have extended the readership. They extend it to other students in the class, who not only read the piece but also actually do something with it, such as responding, rewriting in another form. Summarizing or making comments. Or the teachers specify readers outside the classroom, thus providing student writers with a context in which to select appropriate content, language, and levels of formality. Raimes (1983:9) once gave an example in elaborating the strengths of the communicative approach to writing like this:

“Describe your room at home” is not merely an exercise in the use of the present tense and in prepositions. The task takes on new dimensions when the assignment reads:

\* You are writing to your pen pal’s mother and telling her about your room. You do not like your room and you want to make changes, so you want your pen pal’s mother to “see” what is wrong with your room.

Or

\* You are participating in a student exchange program with another school. Students will exchange schools and homes for three months. A blind student whom you have never written to before will be coming to your home and occupying your room. Describe the room in detail so that that student will be able to picture it, imagining that your description will then be read onto tape so that the student can listen to it.

It is obvious that each assignment of the three above has a clear audience and purpose. Not only are students more interested in such writing assignments, but also they are much easier to fulfill as a communicative act with a clear understanding of a certain purpose and audience. The shining point of this approach is its concept of communication. And the following task-based approach can be regarded as its extension based on the same concept.

#### 7. Task-based approach

Teachers preferring this approach tend to divide a writing assignment into various tasks, presuming that student writers can develop their writing ability during the process of completing writing tasks.

Generally, writing tasks are divided into two categories. The first category is academic writing, and the second is communication-oriented writing tasks. Teachers tend to design various communication-oriented writing tasks for students to fulfill, holding the belief that for EFL students, communication-oriented writing is more required than academic writing. Massi (2001) lists some forms of writing tasks: a letter to the English teacher; sending a letter abroad; writing a letter to the author of a story; e-mail writing; film reviews, stories and opinion articles; providing an alternative ending; an introduction to an anthology of short stories; journal writing; and a personal anthology.

The focus of the tasks can vary, ranging from an emphasis on the skills such as selection of topic, disposition of the information, complexity of utterances, lexical choice or tone of the text, according to the students' developmental stages, to a more functional focus such as informing, persuading, requesting, entertaining, convincing and so on. Apart from that, the combination of skills is fostered, depending on the task and its complexity, so that along the drafting-writing-revision procedure, listening, speaking, reading and writing will overlap and intertwine, involving thinking, talking, consulting sources, doing research, peer-editing, interacting in groups and the like. On some occasions, cultural aspects are at play and students may need some help to become familiarized with specific conventions and constraints in the target culture: the key elements are a clearly defined content and adequate rhetorical schemata.

One of the strengths of this approach is similar to that of the communicative approach, in that both draw attention to the importance of writing purpose and audience. According to the difficulty or complexity of writing tasks, some require students to fulfill tasks in pairs or groups, which is favorable for students to carry out collaborative study. Another conspicuous feature of this approach is that it attempts to integrate four basic skills of language learning into one framework in which writing ability is cultivated with listening, talking and reading together. The defect of this approach may come from the difficulty of applying it to teaching practice since it demands a relatively high ability for teachers on the aspect of developing a task creatively and practically besides a good knowledge of target language.

#### 8. Discourse-based approach

The concept of discourse coherence has fascinated discourse analysts and language educators. Discourse analysts inquire into what constitutes coherent discourse. In other words, what distinguishes a text, which is perceived by the listener or reader as "hanging together", from a random collection of sentences? Language educators, on the other hand, are more concerned with the practical question of helping students produce coherent discourse. For language educators, the impending

concern is how to draw on insights from discourse analysis to provide directions for pedagogy. Prompted by this desire, a discourse approach to writing teaching comes into being.

In the writing classroom, several specialists (Connor and Farmer, 1990; Lautamatti, 1990; Wine, 1983) have suggested that topical organization analysis is a promising technique for improving the coherence of written work. Lautamatti (1990) develops a technique for analyzing writing in terms of the relationship between the discourse topic and the sentence topics that make up a text. She argues that a text can be developed in three different ways, and that these ways are evident in the distribution of topics in succeeding sentences in a text. The first of these is through “parallel progression”, in which succeeding sentences in a text are semantically identical. For example:

“The ability to carry electricity varies according to the extent to which substances contain electrons that are free to move. It is not something possessed by all substances.” The second is sequential progression. Here the topic of each succeeding sentence is different. For example:

“The ability to carry electricity varies according to the extent to which substances contain electrons that are free to move. Some substances contain few such molecules, and are therefore poor conductors.”

In extended parallel progression, there is a return to a topic that has already been instantiated in an earlier sentence. For example:

“The ability to carry electricity varies according to the extent to which substances contain electrons that are free to move. Some substances contain few such molecules, and are therefore poor conductors. This ability has been closely studied by physicists in recent years.”

Wine (1983) used the concept as a tool to investigate the revision process, and as a device for studying perceptions of the quality of students’ writing. More recently, Connor and Farmer (1990, pp.126-139) have reported on their experiences in using topical organization analysis as a revision tool for ESL students in intermediate and

advanced level college writing classes. Students are taken through the steps involved in identifying topics and producing topical organization diagrams. They then apply the techniques to their own writing, usually after the production of a first draft. “Student response has been positive; many have remarked that the procedure helps them to examine the meanings of their sentences and forces them to relate these meanings to the main topic and purpose of their writing. When we teach the analysis as a revision tool, we note improvement in student writing, specifically in regard to clearer focus (thanks to added extended parallel progression) and better development of subtopics (thanks to improved ratio of parallel and sequential progressions)”. (p. 134)

Nunan (1999) indicates in his work that while the technique of getting students to turn a set of propositions or simple sentences into coherent discourse is a relatively straightforward one, the processes that the writer must go through are extremely complex. To produce coherent discourse, writers must exploit what they already know about the subject at hand and integrate it with information from other sources; they must draw on knowledge of the way that grammar and discourse function together; they are required to use cohesion appropriately so they must sort out form/function, and they have to decide on the topic to form the point of departure of each succeeding sentence in the text. He further provides examples of tasks from a writing program developed from a functional perspective:

- 1) Focusing on functions in introductory paragraphs
- 2) Focusing on paragraph development from a functional perspective
- 3) Focusing on cohesion
- 4) Focusing on topicalization —the process of giving prominence to particular entities, states of affairs, or processes within a sentence or utterance by shifting them to the beginning of the sentence.
- 5) Using grammatical resources to create discourse

Whether the discourse approach is more useful in developing students writing ability or effective in cultivating students' awareness when doing revision, it does work well in solving the problem which has long been bewildering writing teachers and students: Why do the students who are able to produce correct sentences still produce texts that are considered by native-English-speaking readers to be incoherent? Some are even considered by writing specialists as "nothing more than the outward and visible sign of bad thinking" (Campbell, 1939, p.179). Since this approach emphasizes the importance of coherence, cohesion and topicalization of a text, it can also help student writers to shape good thinking not only in their English writing but also in other subjects learning.

#### 9. Process approach

Since the middle of the 1970's, the teaching of writing has begun to move away from a concentration on the written product to an emphasis on the process of writing. Writers ask themselves not only questions about purpose and audience, but also the crucial questions:

How do I write this? How do I get started? The process approach has developed in part as a reaction against the traditional form-focused writing approach and focuses on the writer as an independent producer of texts. It lays particular stress on a cycle of writing activities which move learners from the generation of ideas and the collection of data through to the publication of a finished text.

Zamel (1983) defines process writing as "a non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning" (p. 165). In the process of trial and error, writers find their own solutions to the problems they set themselves (White & Arndt, 1991, p.5). This is quite distinct from a product-oriented approach, which focuses on the end result of the learning process, and is consistent with the nature of writing in the sense that the approach is composed of interrelated steps "that correspond to many different

stages--generating ideas, planning, writing, evaluating, and rewriting". (Flowerdew, 1993, p. 305)

The strengths of the process approach can be summarized as below: First, the process approach emphasizes the process of writing instead of the final product. It stresses times of drafting and redrafting for one article. The multi-faceted nature of writing suggests that a writer go through a procedure demanding highly cognitive efforts before finishing a final draft to his or her satisfaction.

Second, the process approach emphasizes the importance of "free-writing". Free-writing is writing that is "free" of the editor. The goal of free writing is to generate as much material as possible (usually in 10-20 minutes). In order to achieve this goal Elbow (1979) suggests the most important thing is to remember: Do not stop to check spelling; do not stop to think about grammar; do not stop to cross out or read what you have written; do not stop for anything. According to him, the most important heuristic that free-writing affords is that it forces the students to think in English. If they are really free-writing and not stopping for anything, then there is not sufficient time to translate from the LI into the L2, and they are more likely to write native-like articles. The students can go back to the piece later and edit, after all the ideas are safely down on the paper. Whether free-writing results in more native-like articles still remains to be proved, but one thing is obvious--- that it is useful for students to generate as many ideas as possible because it leaves little time to consider the form during the writing process. At this point, it works well in solving the problem of content facing student writers.

Third, process approach emphasizes the importance of collaborative work among students. Group work has been shown to be valuable for native speakers who are learning to write. Research also shows that inexperienced writers are less fearful when a few of their peers read and comment on what they write; they like to see what their peers produce, and they welcome the unthreatening exchange of ideas they produce in a small group. For elementary EFL learners, they need more time and opportunity to practice using the language with others in that at the beginning stage group work is

especially beneficial in the aspect of lessening the solitary situation of student writer and enriching the ideas about a writing topic.

Fourth, the process approach emphasizes self-revision or peer revision of students' writing products. In the classroom, students are encouraged to "share" their writing such as showing first drafts to partners for comment and advice as part of a process of revision. Sharing assists writers in that they receive questions and comments on their intentions and on the organization and clarity of their writing. It creates an audience to respond to writing.

According to this teaching mode, the teacher guides students in class to proceed via several stages: pre-writing talks; free writing; peer feedback; teacher feedback and revision. Generally, the teacher does not assign particular writing topics, does not explain the concrete criteria of writing, does not analyze the students' paradigm, and does not assign grammar exercises. (Zamel, 1981) The teaching theory reflected by this teaching mode is that learning writing must depend on extensive and wide-ranging writing practice. That is to say, students could learn how to write naturally only by personal writing and some comments; the more he or she writes, the higher the quality becomes.

To put it objectively, the process approach to writing teaching has many positive aspects, and much of the value of it has derived from its invigorating effect on classroom writing practices and from its recognition of the importance of the experiences that learners bring with them to the classroom. However, it has its limitations and cannot be seen as answering the needs of all types of student. As regards to the effect of process writing, Tsang and Wong (1993, p. 163) report regarding Chinese college students that the approach "helped to develop confidence and fluency, while improving content and discourse organization. But it failed to effect major improvement at the sentence level of vocabulary, language, use, and mechanics." Thus the approach seems to be effective in developing learners' confidence in and a positive attitude towards EFL writing at the macro-level, but not so at the micro-level.

One criticism is that, left to themselves, young writers will produce recounts and narratives, but not the sorts of factual writing that they need to succeed in school. Martin (1989) argues that factual writing fosters the development of critical thinking skills, which in turn encourage the individual to explore and challenge social reality. Another critic of the approach is Rodriguez, who argues that the unfettered writing process approach has been just as artificial as the traditional high school research paper. Writing without organization accomplishes as little as writing a mock organization ... [Students] need organization, they need models to practice. They need to improve even mechanical skills, and they still need time to think through their ideas, to revise them, for real purposes and real audiences. Another limitation is that it does not necessarily address the needs of a learner who has to write for readers unknown to him or her, especially for readers with specific expectations of what a text should be like if it is to achieve its effect. During the mid 1980s, both teachers and language researchers came to realize the defect of the process-oriented approach. Tribble (1996) indicates that when we consider approaches to the teaching of writing which focus on the writer and give special emphasis to the processes involved in writing, a question which arose in this discussion is the extent to which a methodology with a primary focus on the writer can fully address the needs of all learners, especially if they are learning to write in a second or foreign language. Without appropriate language input and systematic instruction, L2 learners would find it very difficult to tackle writing tasks. Therefore, the process approach cannot be used in isolation.

#### 10. Genre approach

The definition of the term “genre” varies somewhat between different writers, but most follow Swales (1990) in relating the concept of genre to communicative events or acts. In such approaches, genres are defined not in terms of their language, but by features, which could be described as external to the text itself. These include areas such as text purpose, the relationships between writers and readers, and the medium of communication (e.g. newspaper article, letter, e-mail message). These

external characteristics naturally have implications for the internal features of the text, including areas such as syntax, lexical choice, and organizational layout.

Tribble (1996) argues that while a process approach will certainly make it possible for apprentice writers to become more effective at generating texts, this may be of little avail if they are not aware of what their readers expect to find in those texts. He proposes the genre approach to the teaching of writing, focusing on the reader and emphasizing the constraints of form and content that have to be recognized when a writer attempts to match a text to a social purpose. An example of writing a letter is given below:

Letter A

Dear Sirs, After waiting for two weeks for a reply about the letter of complain I send to you. I

thought it was necessary for me to write you again in order to let you know how disappointed I am.

My present accommodation is rather ramshackle and moreover I haven' t got enough basic facilities, like a real shower with hot water or a toilet flush which is not all the time out of order.

I am expecting from you to something about it as soon as possible, because my conditions of Living are rather rough.

I looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully \_\_\_\_\_

Letter B

Dear Sir,

I am very unhappy with the accommodation you have arranged for me. I have already argued in person but in vain; here the bathroom is dirty and the shower doesn't work

and more over a security system is inexistent.

I would like to have a more suitable accommodation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully - \_\_\_\_\_

Both letters contain vocabulary, spelling and grammar mistakes —i-ndeed, there are more of these in A than B. Yet, letter A is felt to be better, in spite of its limitations. Tribble (1996, pp.45-46) analyzes the reason from the perspective of genre. In his opinion, letter A begins with an attempt to establish a relationship with the reader. The writer has recognized that there is a need to explain why the letter is being written, and why he or she feels that there are grounds for complaint. It is only after this attempt at relationship-building has been made that details are given. Letter B, by contrast, goes directly into the detail of the complaint and does not attempt to establish a relationship with the reader. Even though the writer wants to get something done and to improve the situation, the letter fails to make even the slightest concession to the reader. It would seem that most readers of letters of complaint in English expect there to be this sort of concession. Although “letter of complaint” is not a highly technical genre, it does appear to impose constraints on writers who wish to use it effectively and to confer benefits on those who try to conform to those generic constraints. Even if writers do not have full control of the language system, so long as they attempt to signal their willingness to make a relationship with the person they are complaining to—in other words to write within the genre—their letter has a better chance of success. This again indicates how a straightforward focus on form, emphasizing accuracy of expression, will fail to provide learners with the sorts of knowledge that make it possible for them to communicate effectively in given contexts.

The introduction of the concept of genre enriches the field of writing teaching. To some extent, it can be regarded as the development of a communicative approach. The genre approach is more socially oriented and focuses on the ways in which writers and texts need to interact with readers.