



EFL Writing in Mexican Universities: Research and Experience

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PREFACE

EFL Writing in Mexican Universities: Research and Experience represents a major step forward in higher education writing in Mexico. It is the outgrowth of a symposium in August 2008 held on the campus of Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla that brought together faculty members from campuses across Mexico that had been researching writing and developing writing programs. This meeting, which I had the pleasure of attending, had the great excitement and energy of important beginnings, and fostered important discussions about how to carry forward common concerns in an enduring organization. The work presented at the conference and in this volume crossed borders between second language writing in English and first language writing in Spanish. As several of the studies in this volume reveal, there is a close relation between writing in first and second languages, with lessons learned in each carry over to the other, whether at the level of language, rhetoric, or process.

This volume and the related emerging network of Mexican writing educator-scholars recognize the importance of students to be able to write in both first and second languages in order to develop thinking, communicative skill, and participation in the global knowledge network. They also reflect growing institutional commitment to that educational task, as every one of these studies comes from newly developing and expanding programs.

The studies in this volume contribute substantially to our knowledge of the relation of L1 and L2 writing and the specific context and experience of Mexican language education. The opening chapter by Encinas, Kerenan, and Salazar reviews the previous research done by scholars in isolation that set the groundwork for this new emergent network. The work focuses on students' texts, writing processes, and contexts for their work; together this work starts to sketch out the particular characteristics of student writing that need to be addressed by Mexican writing educators.

The rest of the volume provides fresh contributions to the project of understanding Mexican EFL writing in context, presented in three major sections: (1) Contrastive rhetoric, (2) The writing process, and (3) Voice, beliefs and expectations. Crawford in the second chapter considers the special character of Mexican education and culture that frame the rhetoric students use in their writing, a rhetoric that has expectations that differ from those of more standard English models. Englander then considers corpus studies of academic writing in Spanish and in English by Spanish speakers, to identify characteristic linguistic forms in Spanish that transfer to English production. She locates these transferred forms in a fresh corpus from her students' writing.

Part two comprises two chapters. The dynamic interaction between Spanish language and English language writing is the subject of Pamplon's chapter 4,

presenting a study comparing writing processes in L1 and L2. Using talk-aloud methods, the author finds that what is learned in one language influences writing processes in the other, even if the lessons are from the later-learned L2. Santos in chapter 5 studies in fine detail students' use of dictionaries in the course of writing, revealing that proficiency provides students with a greater variety of strategies in solving lexical problems, with the result that they use the dictionary less often, but with more refined informational needs.

Part three includes a pair of chapters that explore the struggles students have to develop their voices within institutional and evaluative demands. In Chapter 6 Mugford finds evidence in student reflective writing that the pressures for correctness limit students' opportunities and motivations to explore with language to meet their expressive intent. This constraint limits their voice and language learning. In Chapter 7 Olmos examines in greater detail how various undergraduate students struggle with specific linguistic resources to create an authorial self within the conventional expectations of academic writing. This authorial self positions themselves ideationally, interpersonally, and textually. The largest group of chapters explores beliefs of students and teachers about writing and the teaching of writing. In chapter 8, Hidalgo through in-depth interviews with MA students writing in Spanish reveals how their previous education has prepared or not prepared them for their current challenges in writing a thesis. This chapter provides extremely important insights into the role of writing in Spanish-medium higher education and the ways various instructors provide or do not provide support for student writing. Tapia, in chapter 9, explores students' beliefs about their writing and their ability to complete their theses and other professional writing. Mora, in chapter 10, considers how native and non-native English speaking instructors differ in their views of and response to student writing.

A major theme of the entire volume is that writing in bilingual situations animates knowledge from both languages and that writing education in either language needs to be cognizant of experiences, practices, and knowledge of the other. Further it reminds us that writing education comes from many directions and experiences. Only by understanding all these influences and their relation will we grasp what our students are learning, what they need to learn, how we can support them, and ultimately how writing can become a tool to express their thoughts and purposes in whatever setting, profession, and language they choose.

Charles Bazerman