

CHAPTER 3

REVISING PROCESS

1 INTRODUCTION: REVISING PROCESS IN WRITING

Fitzgerald (1987: 484) wrote:

'revision means making any changes at any point in the writing process. It involves identifying discrepancies between intended and instantiated text, deciding what could or should be changed in the text and how to make desired changes and operating, that is, making the desired changes. Changes may or may not affect meaning of the text and they may be major or minor.'

The key elements of this definition concern the fact that revising involves making some changes, whatever they are, not only in the text but also during the whole writing process. For the author, revision necessitates three main operations: identifying a problem, deciding about any change and operating it. It also involves two objects (the intended text and the instantiated text), two types of rules (conventions: what should be changed, and rhetorical rules: what could be changed), and strategies (how to implement the desired changes).

Despite the apparent simplicity of this definition, numerous other definitions of revision are found in the literature and can be very different. This fact underlines the ambiguity of the term 'revision', that designates both the realisation of a correction and the different procedures (or processes) used to revise (Freedman, 1986).

It therefore appears important, in this chapter, (1) to clearly define the term of revision, (2) to expose, through several models, how the activity of revision operates, and (3) to try to surround problems that prove to be important to solve when proposing a procedural and functional model of revision.

1.1 Definition of the revising process

In Hayes and Flower's (1980) model, the revising process, called 'Reviewing', is conceived as being recurrently distributed throughout the writing activity. This process is composed of two sub-processes, respectively labelled by the authors 'Reading' and 'Editing' (Cf. General Introduction). The Reading sub-process allows the writer to detect errors and to evaluate the appropriateness of the written text in relation with the communicative goals established during the Planning process. The Editing sub-process appears as a system of production rules to solve problems.

While rereading the text, the writer can perceive dissonance between intention and production (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1983), which asks for or necessitates a

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correction stage. This procedure of correction can, according to Bartlett (1982), be outlined in three main sub-processes: Detection, Identification and Modification of the text portion considered as erroneous by the writer. However, the already written text is not the unique object of revision. Revision is also a process of rethinking thoughts, of evaluating and clarifying them (Chanquoy, 1997, 2001; McCutchen, Francis and Kerr, 1997; McCutchen, Hull and Smith, 1987). In fact, the revision activity can be considered as an activity of text reading or thought evaluation, followed, in the case of dissonance(s), by some corrections. In this way, the revision can then be defined as a set of processes, that consist, as previously defined by Fitzgerald (1987), of identifying a problem, deciding whether to change or not the part of the text in which the problem has been found, and selecting a strategy and operating it. In addition, writers carry out revisions in order to verify and improve their texts (Faigley and Witte, 1981; Hayes and Flower, 1986; Hayes, Flower, Schriver, Stratman and Carey, 1987), but also to verify and eventually improve the mental representation(s) elaborated during the writing activity. The revision can thus be considered as a complex process that would heavily weigh on writer's limited attentional capacities (Beal, 1996; McCutchen, 1996).

1.2 Taxonomy of revisions

Another approach to define the revising process is to classify the different kinds of revision that appear in texts. Some authors have tempted to categorise revisions, according to certain types of criteria. For example, Sommers (1980) has specified four revising operations: the 'Deletion', the 'Substitution', the 'Shifting' and the 'Reorganisation', that can be carried out in four different linguistic levels: the word, the phrase, the sentence, or the idea. Monahan (1984) has added or modified dimensions to Sommers' categorisation. The author proposed four dimensions: (1) the moment during which the revision occurs (for example, on the draft or on the final copy), (2) the linguistic level of the revision (to revise a word, a phrase, a clause, a sentence, a paragraph, or the whole text), (3) the type of correction (addition, deletion, rearrangement, embedding) and finally, (4) the objective of the revision (visual presentation of the text, spelling, style, emphasis of transitions, supplementary information, *etc.*). The important point in this classification is that Monahan extended the definition of revision, with a goal-related and a functional perspective. In a more general way, two great types of modifications, or again two categories of revising activities are taken into account by Chanquoy (1997): (1) the changes she labelled 'Surface Revisions', which comprise modifications of punctuation (addition of a capital letter or a punctuation mark), the re-writing of a word or a text segment considered as hardly legible, spelling corrections, grammatical spelling (subject-verb agreements, verb tenses, *etc.*), and (2) the 'Deep' or 'Semantic Revisions', that modify the sense of the text and comprise additions, deletions, shifting, substitutions and transformations of words, phrases, clauses, sentences or longer text segments. Furthermore, for each of these categories, the modifications can be considered as cor-

rect, erroneous or neutral (*i.e.*, neutral corrections do not improve the quality of the text, but do not decrease it; *Cf.* also Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1983).

Although there currently exists a relatively great variety of revision classifications, the taxonomy elaborated by Faigley and Witte (1981, 1984), even if it is now outdated, is nevertheless still the only one that takes into account both syntactic and semantic aspects of revision. Indeed, six types of operations and six linguistic levels are distinguished. This classification considers, as the preceding proposal, the level of text considered: revisions can be superficial (*i.e.*, surface changes), or change the meaning of the text (*i.e.*, text-based – semantic – changes). In addition, this classification proposes a certain number of revising subcategories. Thus, surface changes can be formal (formal changes: spelling, punctuation, *etc.*), or can preserve the text meaning (meaning-preserving changes: additions, deletions, *etc.*). Similarly, text-based changes can be micro- (additions, deletions, *etc.*) or macro-structural (*Cf.* Table 2).

Table 2: Taxonomy of revision, adapted from Faigley and Witte (1981)

Surface revisions	
Formal Changes (conventional editing revisions)	Meaning preserving changes (paraphrases)
Spelling	Addition
Tense	Deletion
Number and modality	Substitution
Abbreviation	Permutation
Punctuation	Distribution
Format	Consolidation
Semantic revisions	
Microstructural changes (minor revisions)	Macrostructural changes (major revisions)
Addition	Addition
Deletion	Deletion
Substitution	Substitution
Permutation	Permutation
Distribution	Distribution
Consolidation	Consolidation

According to this table, in surface changes that keep the meaning and in micro- and macrostructural revisions that modify the meaning, the operations are the same, only their depth level in the text can change.

Whatever the chosen taxonomy to classify revisions, it is always difficult to distinguish between a surface or a mechanical error and a meaning error (*Cf.* Chanquoy, 1998). The addition of an adjective can, for example, be considered as a surface modification, because it does not modify the meaning of the text, or as a deeper

change, changing the meaning of the sentence. For example, if the sentence '*the boat was sailing on the sea*' is revised as '*the boat was sailing on the blue sea*', the modification is only a superficial one, and does not change the global meaning of the sentence. Conversely, if this sentence is modified to '*the boat was sailing on the furious sea*', the meaning is radically changed.

Besides classifications exclusively concerning revisions of the already produced text, some authors distinguish two modes of revision (revision here in the sense of the activity of correction): an updating activity, automatically released and an activity of revision, controlled and intentional. The controlled revision activity would intervene during precise moments of the writing process (Matsuhashi, 1987) and would then be opposed to the editing activity (Editing sub-process of Hayes and Flower, 1980), automatised and mechanical, able to intervene at any given time during writing, and even to interrupt the other processes (Cf. Bridwell, 1980; Faigley & Witte, 1981, 1984; Graves, 1975; Hayes & Flower, 1980; Kaufer, Hayes, & Flower, 1986; Perl, 1979).

The term of revision therefore designates both the complex process of changes carried out during writing and the changes effectively realised by the writer. Up till now, the authors have generally distinguished between effective revision on paper and mental revision (Cf. *supra*). The first category has been classified, as previously mentioned. Conversely, the second type, due to its mental aspect, is more difficult to approach and categorise, except when researchers use, for example, verbal protocol analyses. Thus, this definition of revision can be proposed: something (*i.e.*, a word) is done (*i.e.*, added, deleted, *etc.*) to reach a certain goal (improving style, content), at a certain text level and on a certain text (pretext, already written text), at a certain moment (*i.e.*, draft, final copy), with a certain effect (*i.e.*, improvement, neutral, decreasing effect) and with a certain cognitive cost.

Even if, through the previous theoretical presentation of revision, it is possible to roughly define the revising process, it is still quite difficult to explain how revision works. It is therefore by means of models, presented hereafter, that the process of revision will be described. The revising processes (or sub-processes), and external or internal modifications to which they lead, are presented, through an analysis of the evolution of revision models. This presentation would, in addition, allow specifying the different sub-processes and operations in the progress of revision.

2 EVOLUTION OF REVISION MODELS: FROM REVIEWING PROCESS TO SPECIFIC AND PROCEDURAL MODELS OF REVISION

2.1 Hayes and Flower's first proposals (1980, 1983; Flower and Hayes, 1981c)

In the initial Hayes and Flower (1980) model, revision is viewed as an autonomous process, called Reviewing, and composed of two sub-processes: Reading and Editing, that simply involve checking and correcting the text, already written or simply mentally planned (Cf. Piolat & Roussey, 1991-1992 or Temple, Nathan, Temple, & Burris, 1993 for a description of the revision activity). The Editing activity is considered as recursive, possibly appearing at any time during the writing process (Cf.

also: Collins & Gentner, 1980; Faigley, Cherry, Jolliffe, & Skinner, 1985; Fitzgerald, 1987; Piolat, 1988, 1990; van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam & Breetvelt, 1993) and, consequently, may also interrupt the progress of the other activities. It can also appear after the text has been entirely written (Faigley & Witte, 1981, 1984). The Reading sub-process is voluntarily released, so as to evaluate the text produced-so-far. The Editing sub-process comprises production rules concerning possible corrections (*i.e.*, to correct semantic imprecision, to evaluate the precision for the reader, *etc.*). This sub-process allows both automatic and controlled corrections (*i.e.*, it can interrupt any other writing process).

Thus, according to Hayes and Flower (1980), as soon as a discrepancy between intended text and external text has been detected, the Editing sub-process would function in an irrepressible and automatic manner. This puts nevertheless the problem of the correction of this error. According to these authors, once the error has been detected, the writer would immediately (or almost immediately) have means (or production rules) to solve it; it is thus possible to wonder why an error is committed...

The framework of Reviewing, such as proposed by Hayes and Flower (1980) in their general writing model, enables distinguishing two sub-processes and specifying that the revision has to be approached both as an internal (evaluation) and external phenomenon (effective corrections). However, this formalisation is insufficient. This is all the more paradoxical because the activity of revision is thereafter studied in a particularly intensive manner, by these authors and other researchers, and has led to increasingly complex architectures, resulting in formalisations sometimes more complex than the general text production process itself. Besides, a year after the 1980 model, Flower and Hayes (1981c) have slightly modified the theoretical position they had previously defended. Then, still two sub-processes are distinguished in the Revising activity, the 'Evaluation' sub-process (that globally corresponds to the Reading sub-process in the 1980 model; *i.e.*, to read and to compare the already produced text with the intended text) and the 'Revision' sub-process (also similar to the Editing sub-process, that roughly involves correcting the errors that can be found in the text). However, opposed to the 1980 model, Revision is in this instance considered to be deliberate. Consequently, contrary to their preceding proposal, the Reviewing process and its two sub-processes are considered as controlled. More precisely, Revision sub-process is no longer limited to an automatic correction activity that functions according to production rules.

In their publication of 1983, Hayes and Flower distinguish the activity of 'Reviewing' from the activity of 'Revising'. This distinction relies on the 'external' or 'internal' characteristics of revisions that are carried out by the writer. Reviewing is necessary to evaluate what is written or what has been planned, and it can lead to the detection of discrepancies between the intended and the written or to be written text. Thus, Reviewing is considered by the authors as a mental (or internal) activity whereas Revising is an external activity, allocating the text and leading to physical modifications, which can be traced in the text surface (external revisions; *Cf.* also,

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