

Preface

“Anyone that picks up a pen can be a writer”

(Graham, 1999, p. 363)

Rationale For Choosing the Topic

The time I spent on working on this book enabled me to understand many things. I remember when I was reading Casanave’s book, in which the author said that she went through many stages of her teaching beliefs: first she followed the principles of audiolingualism, mainly because she lacked any formal education in applied linguistics and relied on her coursebooks a lot; then she switched to the communicative approach to language teaching, forgetting about grammar for some time. Only later did she realise that going to extremes in language pedagogy is not the best way.

I believe the same thing could be said about me. I reflect on my teaching at the Berlitz Language Centre, in which the input and the interaction were only in the target language. Everything the students did and every task they were assigned had to reflect real life. In this way, the only practised genres of the writing skill were the ones that could be encountered in real-life situations, namely emails, letters of complaint, etc. At that time, it was difficult to find a dedicated language instructor who believed in what she was doing. However, when I started teaching my first writing course at the university with first year students, I knew something was wrong. On the one hand, the students were passionate about the language they chose to study; however, it was difficult to see that passion reflected in their compositions, which were clichéd realisations of genres such as the narrative or descriptive essay. The moment they heard which genre they would be expected to

practise, they became demotivated and immediately lost interest in the classes. The same turned out to be true in the case of another element of the course, namely journals, which were supposed to provide an opportunity for the students to develop their writing skills in a free, unrestricted way. They could write whatever they wished and nobody was going to punish them for drifting away from the topic or making linguistic mistakes. Still, the journals turned out to be another task to be performed for the classes rather than with an opportunity to let the words fly from their minds onto paper.

I am not prepared to claim that there is no fault of mine in what happened in both cases, which only shows that the role of a teacher who understands and believes in what she is doing is undisputed. Yet probably, this was what triggered the lack of students' interest in the classes, namely my lack of understanding the philosophy behind what I was doing. My mistake was to rely on ready-made materials to teach L2 writing, which very often are not interesting for the students, as they approach the genres they had already practised in their high school in exactly the same way. Also, I did not get the idea of journals myself; the effect was that students were contributing to their journal on an irregular basis, when they knew I would be reading them, instead of working regularly.

But learning is a continuous process. Upon making better sense of the goals of the course, the students' experience and the reasons for assigning various tasks, my attitude towards writing classes (and writing in general) changed completely: I believed in what I was doing. Instead of relying on ready-made materials, I designed my own, very often based on authentic texts, namely passages from novels I was reading at that time, which served as examples of descriptive or narrative paragraphs. We also read excerpts from selected autobiographies, which enabled the students to first experience samples of good writing and then find an incentive to write their own autobiography. The effect was very often astounding! But it was not only my students' compositions that were much better, but also their positive attitude towards the course and towards writing, something I could not observe in the past. This is because the teacher is the key figure in a community of practice. As my mentor Łukasz Salski says: "If we believe that our students are stupid, they will be stupid. But if we believe that our students are clever, they will become clever."

Now, every year during the very first and the very last class of my writing course, I ask my students to share with me what writing means to them. At the beginning of the semester, the answers I hear are usually as follows: writing is boring, time-consuming, the topics the students are asked to write about are boring, you need to like writing to be good at it, you need to know grammar and vocabulary to be a good writer, and you must be creative and talented in order to create an interesting composition. However, on finishing the course their answers change: they begin to see that writing gives freedom and allows flexibility; the students start to like writing, which they used to hate before. They see that they are able to write something meaningful in a foreign language.

My favourite explanation of writing is the one below, provided by my mentor in the field of writing:

To set off on any journey we need a stimulus that not only spurs us to act, but also determines which direction we go and how fast we wish to reach our destination. Depending on that drive, we make other choices, related to who travels with us, what we want to take with us, or what means of transport to use. Then comes the travel itself, with all the uncertainty and unexpected events it brings about until we reach our destination. Finally, travel leads to change in people, which is one of the reasons why it has mesmerized writers for centuries. Similarly, writing starts with motivation and preparation of what needs to be packed in the text. Then, the writing process, like travel, involves choices, decisions, strategies, and leads to a destination—the product. Inevitably, just like travel changes the traveler, writing develops the writer.

(Salski, 2014, p. 38)

In the above quotation, writing is compared to travel; it is depicted as a process which is complex, which requires time and effort, but which also allows us to develop, maybe even change. Hence, writing cannot be a waste of time and it should not be marginalized to home assignments only. I hope that this book will allow the reader to get an opportunity to see how the students feel when they are writing, what problems they face most often, and what motivates them to write. For some of them, writing in L2 may become a great chance to put on a mask, to assume a new identity, free of all the negative experience they associate with writing in L1. I deeply believe that the only thing a good teacher needs to do to become a real teacher is to engage with their students, their needs and interests, and to give them a chance to fly high.

Goals of the Book

The questions I set out to answer in the present book concerned the EFL writing process. My first area of interest within the field of EFL writing was investigating advanced EFL students' beliefs and attitudes. It was of interest to me to find out about the students' attitudes towards writing and whether it depends on their writing experience. I aimed to determine in which language the students find writing easier: is it their mother tongue (Polish) or the foreign language (English)? My intention was also to investigate whether there is any difference in the reasons why students prefer to write in a given language and what their preference depends on. Another question addressed the potential recourse to other languages in the process of writing. In which stage of the writing process is this recourse most frequent? And what does it depend on? Furthermore, it was worth researching whether writing instructors refer to other languages or knowledge acquired via other languages. Finally, it was also interesting for me to check what writing experience the students have in general, how much they write outside school, and what they concentrate on when writing.

Apart from researching students' beliefs about writing, I was also interested to verify whether the students' beliefs are reflected in their actual writing practices. For this reason, I set out to answer the following questions on the basis of the students' writing processes: How do students approach writing? Are there any differences between writing in L1 and in L2? Next, I also inquired about references made to other languages in the process of writing. It was not only interesting for me to know at which stage of the writing process the switches to other(s) languages are most frequent, but also what the nature of these switches is. Namely, do students move between languages when transcribing their ideas, or do they transfer their writing experience gained in another language? Apart from that, I was interested to explore how the students receive their texts: are they more satisfied with their Polish or English texts, and why? And which text is in fact easier to compose? And does it confirm their earlier responses?

The last issue I wished to research concerned the advanced EFL students' perception of the writing processes in the two languages, namely in Polish and in English, as well as what opportunities writing creates for mature EFL writers. I intended to get an insight into the students' perceptions and feelings concerning writing in L1 and L2. The study aimed to better understand the L2 student writer. Therefore, the students' comments on the following metaphors were analyzed: language as a protective shield, language as a doorway to—, language as a tool to organize one's thoughts, and language as a tool to create a new self. In this way, it was possible to better understand the students' choices and the reasons behind them, concerning their preference to write in English, which pertained to such aspects as expressing emotions, attitude towards mistakes, treating the foreign language as a doorway to exploring new opportunities, but also escaping negative classroom experiences. It was extremely interesting for me to verify whether writing in the foreign language provides opportunities for mature EFL writers to create a new self in L2. In other words, it was of interest to me if when writing in the foreign language it is possible to explore a new “me” within oneself.

Structure of the Book

The complexity of writing in a foreign language has been explored in this book from a number of angles. Following this Preface, Chap. 1 gives an insight into the concept of an EFL learner from a bilingual perspective. It is maintained that an advanced EFL learner can successfully be called a bilingual, as he/she is able to communicate in the two languages successfully, both in speaking and writing. The chapter aims at characterizing a bilingual person, discussing factors such as cognitive abilities, mental representations, experiencing and expressing emotions, as well as the complex and changing identity. It is postulated that a bilingual person should not be viewed as possessing “two languages in one mind”, but rather from the multicompetence perspective, which advocates perceiving the bilingual language system as complex and dynamic. The chapter raises issues related to

bilingualism, namely code-switching, translanguaging, and English as a *lingua franca*. The discussion of the place of bilingualism in the school context closes this chapter.

Chapter 2 explores the concept of writing in a foreign language. It focuses on two main aspects, namely beliefs and processes of L2 writing. First, the chapter discusses the importance of investigating beliefs about the teaching and learning process. Then it concentrates on teachers' and students' opinions about writing. Next, it changes its focus into the very process of writing in the foreign language, addressing issues such as similarities and differences in the stages of the writing process concerning writing in L1 and L2, as well as recourse to other languages in the process of writing, with the focus on factors affecting L1 use in L2 writing, the domains and the extent to which L1 is used in L2 writing, as well as L1 use and its impact on L2 text quality. The chapter ends with an argument that a bilingual writer should be looked at from a multicompetence perspective, which would allow for a more complete view on the behaviour and choices of a bilingual writer in the process of creating a text.

Identity is the main theme of Chap. 3. The importance of the notion of identity is discussed. Then, the chapter focuses on language identity and transformations of the self through language. However, the main aim of this chapter is the representation of identity in writing. For this reason, Ivanič's idea of writing and identity is presented and the concept of voice in general and with respect to L2 writing is discussed. Finally, EFL writer identity in a classroom setting is explored.

Chapter 4 is the first of the three empirical chapters. An analysis of the beliefs about writing of B.A. and M.A. students of English Philology, which was made on the basis of questionnaire surveys, will be presented in this chapter. Issues concerning the attitude towards writing, students' writing experience, aspects students concentrate on when writing, difficulties in the process of writing, and references to other languages in the process of creating a text are also investigated. Furthermore, the role of instructor practices in teaching writing is discussed. Finally, issues such as which language it is easier to write in, as well as which language the students would prefer to keep their journal in are investigated.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the second research project, which concentrated on investigating the relationship between the beliefs about writing of advanced EFL students who prefer to write in the foreign language and their actual writing practices. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first reports on individual students' comments after they wrote the texts in Polish and English, while the other makes an attempt at summarizing and generalizing the comments to a population of advanced EFL writers with a preference to write in English. The issues discussed in this chapter focus on the actual reflection of the students' beliefs about writing in their texts and are as follows: how the students approach the task, how they receive their texts, what is difficult for them when writing, how and when they use other languages in the process of writing, why it is easier to write in English and why in Polish, and which language is closer to them mentally.

The final chapter, namely Chap. 6, is also divided into two parts: the first focuses on the advanced EFL student writers' perception of writing in the two languages,

while the other attempts at investigating whether writing in L2 creates opportunities for advanced EFL student writers to create an L2 self. Concerning the students' perception of writing in the two languages, the chapter presents the results of the questionnaire study investigating whether there are any differences in perceiving the writing process in the two languages. The other part is built around four metaphors which were created on the basis of the students' comments in the earlier stages of the research. The metaphors are as follows: language as a protective shield, language as a doorway to–, language as a tool to organize one's thoughts, and language as a tool to create a new self.

The book ends with the Conclusions part, where all the issues mentioned are revisited and implications for teaching foreign language writing are suggested.

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