ESL learners' writing as a window onto discourse competence

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the relationship between writing strategies and the cohesion of writing, and it compares how an ESL learner and a native speaker of English use strategies to organize their written narratives. A text analysis demonstrates that the ESL learner used fewer connectives than the native speaker of English, and produced a less cohesive narrative. Next, taking a qualitative approach, the study explores how the differences in their written products are related to the writers' uses of different writing strategies and processes. The ESL learner used the strategy of translation from L1 to L2 and focused on grammar and vocabulary; the native English speaker drew on a mental template to organize her narrative. The conclusion discusses implications for L2 writing instruction.
Keywords: narrative, cohesion, discourse competence, writing strategies

La escritura de estudiantes ESL escriben como una ventana a la competencia discursiva

RESUMEN: Este estudio explora la relación entre las estrategias de escritura de los alumnos de L2 y la cohesión en las narraciones. Emplea métodos de análisis cualitativos para investigar cómo un estudiante de ESL y un hablante nativo de inglés utilizaron estrategias similares o diferentes para organizar narraciones escritas. Los hallazgos demuestran que el estudiante de ESL usó menos conectivos que el hablante nativo de inglés, y la discusión explora cómo las diferencias se relacionan con los usos de los escritores de diferentes estrategias y procesos de escritura. Algunas de las influencias en sus estrategias de escritura incluyen, en el caso del estudiante de ESL, la traducción de L1 a L2 y un enfoque en la gramática y el vocabulario; y, en el caso del hablante nativo de inglés, la decisión de seguir una plantilla para organizar la narrativa. Los resultados tienen implicaciones educativas importantes para la instrucción de escritura L2.
Palabras clave: narrativa, cohesión, competencia discursiva, estrategias de escritura.

1. INTRODUCTION

For English as a second language (ESL) learners, pursuing higher education in English-speaking countries requires advanced general English skills, particularly writing skills. Competent members of an academic community must be able to produce extended written discourses such as narratives and argumentative essays. Hence, one of the many approaches to assessing whether an L2 learner's proficiency is sufficient for higher education is to use writing tasks that require the production of longer discourse units (Kang, 2009).

One important feature of written discourse competence is cohesion, which is achieved through the use of indexes that show how meanings relate within a text (Halliday & Hasan,

1976). In other words, cohesion expresses semantic relations in the organization of writing, in part by marking information as new or given. Both grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion play important roles in connecting parts of texts at the surface level. Studies on contrastive rhetoric have demonstrated that L2 learners have different patterns than native speakers in establishing cohesion (Kang, 2009; Kaplan, 1966, 2000), and that marking new or given information seems to be difficult for L2 learners.

While most L2 cohesion studies have focused on written products (Crossley et al., 2016; Crossley & McNamara, 2012; Kang, 2005, 2009; Kormos, 2011), it is crucial to understand the process of L2 writing as well. As Polio (2011) noted, investigating writing processes and strategies is necessary to diagnose problems and compare groups of writers. Examining the process of writing should shed light on what motivates learners to organize their writing as they do; for instance, whether vocabulary choices are motivated by the intention to make the writing cohesive.

Nevertheless, few studies have qualitatively examined what motivates L2 learners to use cohesive devices and how they attempt to establish cohesion in their writing. Therefore, the present study qualitatively investigates an ESL learner's ability to establish cohesion in English writing in a written narrative, and compares the learner's writing outcomes and processes to those of a native English-speaking writer. The following section reviews the literature on cohesion in relation to discourse competence, cross-linguistic differences, and writing strategies.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Discourse competence in written production: Cohesion devices

Communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) refers to the ability to produce discourse appropriate to the target language and culture. Many studies have provided evidence of the importance of using cohesive devices appropriately in writing, and of how writers' strategies and discourse competence are reflected in their use of such devices (e.g., Crowhurst, 1987). Lack of cohesion can make it difficult for readers to understand the content of writing; in other words, the ability to use cohesive devices appropriately in writing is a skill that improves a learner's communicative competence in the target language (Kang, 2009).

L2 learners' discourse competence can be assessed by many methods. One way is to examine their use of cohesive devices to connect sentences and make their writing coherent (Kang, 2005; Yasuda, 2019). According to Crossley and McNamara (2012), highly proficient L2 learners produce essays that are both more cohesive and more linguistically sophisticated than those produced by lower proficiency L2 learners.

Among cohesive devices, connectives are particularly useful for assessing L2 learners' discourse competence because connectives link ideas at the sentence level (Kormos, 2011; Wray & Lewis, 1997). For example, Vande Kopple (1985) suggested that connectives help readers follow the development of meanings throughout a text, in part by reminding readers of content mentioned earlier. Kormos (2011) found that genre can affect the use of cohesive devices in writing and that native and non-native speakers used temporal connectives in similar ways to describe a sequence of events. These previous studies' results indicate the importance of better understanding L2 learners' use of connectives for cohesion in writing.

2.2. Cross-linguistic differences in writing

Many contrastive rhetoric studies have investigated L2 learners' writing across languages and cultures (e.g., Kaplan, 1966, 2000; Reid, 1992; Wei et al., 2020). Their findings have demonstrated that L2 learners often have difficulty effectively using cohesive devices in their target language (Harman, 2013; Kang, 2005). For instance, Kang (2009) found that Korean EFL learners tended to rely heavily on nominalization whereas native speakers of English alternately used nouns and pronouns to make their writing more coherent. Hickmann and Hendriks (1999) identified differences in cohesion strategies in the writing of native speakers of English, French, German, and Mandarin Chinese. Taken together, the findings of these studies imply that L1 transfer might lead English learners to use different strategies than native speakers to manage cohesion in their writing. And while these previous studies have reported quantitative findings of cross-linguistic differences, their results suggest that qualitative analyses are needed to explain how different languages' cohesion strategies affect writers' choices.

Many studies of cross-linguistic differences have dealt with argumentative essays. In contrast, this study uses a narrative essay task, because the narrative genre is particularly culture-specific and language-specific (Berman & Slobin, 1994; Kang, 2005; McClure et al., 1993). According to Berman and Slobin (1994), the narrative genre is also useful for investigating learners' L2 developmental path in specific areas such as morphosyntax.

2.3. Writing processes and strategies

Although much research has investigated writing process strategies in general, most studies dealing with L2 learners' writing processes are exploratory, in part because they are still somewhat rare, and in part because the dependent variables are diverse (e.g., Krapels, 1990; Sasaki, 2000, 2004; Wang & Wen, 2002). For instance, Roca de Larios et al. (2008) found that writing proficiency may affect writing processes, and that skilled and unskilled writers differed in terms of their mental modeling. Similarly, Wang and Wen (2002) found influences of L2 proficiency, L1 writing skills, and writing tasks on L2 learners' writing processes. These studies suggest that L2 learners' writing processes are largely influenced by factors involving proficiency.

Several studies elucidate L2 learners' writing strategies (Cumming, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Roca de Larios et al., 1999; Sasaki, 2000). Grabe and Kaplan (1996, p. 223), building on Flower and Hayes's (1981) writing process model, suggested that composing involves three processing types —planning, translating, and reviewing— and that learners' strategies differ depending on their preferences and language abilities. Cumming (2001, p. 5) pointed out that the need to devote attention to finding appropriate vocabulary or grammar could hinder L2 learners' ability to deal with complex ideas in their writing.

Sasaki (2004) conducted a longitudinal examination of L2 learners' writing strategies and processes. She classified writing strategies into five categories: global planning, local planning, thematic planning, translating from L1 to L2, and rhetorical refining. In this exploratory research using video-recorded writing behavior and stimulated recalls, she examined the relationship between writing processes and variables such as proficiency, writing quality,

study-abroad experience, and confidence. One important finding was that study abroad had a positive effect on process-oriented variables (e.g., writing strategies), which shows that strategy use may correlate with language experience. Thus, a writer's language experience might affect their strategies for extending discourse.

2.4. The present study

Previous studies have investigated L2 learners' discourse competence through assessing the use of cohesive devices such as connectives, including cross-linguistic differences, but they have primarily focused on writing products rather than writing strategies and processes. To the best of my knowledge, few studies explore how ESL learners manage connectives in their writing, or how their writing processes relating to connectives compare to those of native English speakers.

In order to address this research gap, the present study investigates the relationship between L2 writing strategies and cohesion, and compares an L2 learner's and a native speaker's writing strategies during the process of writing using qualitative data. The study addresses three research questions:

1. Are there differences in the use of connectives in extended written discourse produced by an ESL learner and a native speaker of English?
2. What strategies are used by an ESL learner and a native speaker of English to establish cohesion?
3. What motivates the choice of strategies of an L2 learner and a native English speaker?

3. Method

3.1. Context and participants

Two participants (Ping and Keira; pseudonyms), both female students at a U.S. university, participated in the study. Ping's L1 is Mandarin Chinese; she was 18 years old and a freshman at the time of the study. Her Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score (79) indicated upper intermediate level English proficiency. At the time of the study, Ping had resided in the U.S. for about six months and was taking an advanced English composition class for ESL learners, in which she practiced different genres of writing. Keira, the native English speaker, was 21 years old and in her senior year. She had studied Korean (Level 1) for a year at the university, but had no other L2 experience. She was earning a minor in linguistics, had taken five linguistics classes, and was in an English grammar analysis class at the time of the study. Because the two participants were at the same university and similar in age and education level, this study can specifically focus on the similarities and differences in their language choices arising from their L1 differences and writing strategy choices.

3.2. Data

The use of multiple data sources (elicited narrative writing, language background questionnaire, video-stimulated recall sessions, and semi-structured interviews) allows this study to triangulate the data and strengthens the validity of its findings.

Narrative essays were elicited from both participants. The narrative genre was chosen because other genres such as argumentative essays must be learned in formal settings such as schools by both native speakers and L2 learners, and thus may be less useful than narratives for finding cross-cultural differences (McClure et al., 1993). Yet, as Kang (2009) noted, personal narratives are not a good way to examine learners' use of cohesive devices because it is difficult to control specific terms and nominal strategies and therefore to make a systematic comparison. Therefore, the wordless picture book, *Frog, Where Are You?* (The IRIS Repository of Instruments for Research into Second Languages; Marsden & Mackey, 2014; Mayer, 1969) was employed to elicit the participants' written narratives, based on previous studies that have found it a reliable method to compare participants' task performance (e.g., Kang, 2005).

A language background questionnaire was adapted from a previous study (Marian et al., 2007).

Stimulated recall and semi-structured interviews were used as retrospective methods to create opportunities for the participants to highlight and explain aspects of their processes, choices, and strategies in writing (e.g., Han & Hyland, 2015). The stimulated recall sessions used videos recorded while the participants wrote; the protocol followed that used by Gass and Mackey (2017). The semi-structured interviews, both conducted in English, were designed to discuss specific aspects of the process or strategies observed during the writing activity.

Figure 1. Example picture from Frog, Where Are You? (Mayer, 1969)

3.3. Procedure

The ESL learner and the NES came individually to a conference room, chatted briefly with the researcher, completed the short language background questionnaire, wrote the essay, and engaged in the stimulated recall and semi-structured interview with the researcher. They were given 30 minutes to write the essay, but both finished within 20 minutes. They were video-recorded while writing, and the video camera focused on the participants' eyes and hand movements as well as on the paper. This procedure was designed to obtain detailed information about the process of writing. The stimulated recall and the interview sessions were conducted right after the participants finished writing, because memory span affects the richness of data collected in these ways. After the writing, the participant watched the video with the researcher, who asked the participant to talk about what she was doing and thinking at the moment of writing. If the participants could not recall their behaviors, further questions were not asked. The participants were also told they could stop the video at any time if they wanted to comment on their writing activities. The stimulated recall session took about an hour. Finally, the semi-structured interview was conducted, which took about 40 minutes.

3.4. Analysis

The data analysis consists of two parts: a text analysis of the cohesion in the writing that the participants produced, and a qualitative analysis of the transcripts of the stimulated recall sessions and the semi-structured interviews.

To measure connectives reliably, Coh-Metrix (Graesser et al., 2004) was utilized for the text analysis. The connectives were classified into four categories: causal (e.g., *because*), logical (e.g., *and*), adversative and contrastive (e.g., *also, however*), and temporal (e.g., *after*). The frequency of each type of connective was calculated.

Sasaki (2004) defined a writing strategy as a writer's mental behavior to achieve a certain goal. For the qualitative analysis, following Sasaki, the content of the participants' retrospective accounts in the stimulated recall sessions was coded into the five categories listed and defined in Table 1. In the interviews, both Ping and Keira voiced concern in regard to three areas: grammar, vocabulary, and organization. One session of stimulated recall was double-coded to achieve intercoder agreement reliability (97%), and any discrepancy was resolved by discussion.

Table 1. Five strategies from participants' retrospective accounts of their writing process (adapted from Sasaki, 2004)

CATEGORY	DEFINITION
Global planning	Detailed planning of overall organization
Local planning	Less detailed planning of overall organization
Thematic planning	Planning what to write next
Translating from L1 to L2	Translating the generated ideas into L2
Rhetorical refining	Refining the rhetorical aspects of an expression

In the following section, the results of the study are presented and discussed to answer the research questions.

4. Rᴇsᴜʟᴛs

4.1. Frequency of use of connectives

Table 2 shows the connective incidence scores, according to Coh-Metrix, for Ping's and Keira's narratives. As the table shows, Keira used more connectives overall than Ping. Specifically, Keira produced more causal, logical, and temporal connectives than Ping, but not more adversative or contrastive connectives.

Table 2. ESL learner's and NES's use of connectives in a narrative (per 1000 words)

Vᴀʀɪᴀʙʟᴇ: Cᴏɴɴᴇᴄᴛɪᴠᴇ Iɴᴄɪᴅᴇɴᴄᴇ	Pɪɴɢ	Kᴇɪʀᴀ
All connectives	90.909	101.695
Causal	12.987	31.477
Logical	32.468	55.69
Adversative and contrastive	19.481	14.528
Temporal	12.987	33.898

4.2. Qualitative analysis

The frequency analysis showed that Ping and Keira seemed to use connectives differently in their narrative essays. This section reports on the qualitative analysis of the data from their stimulated recall sessions and interviews, with the goal of clarifying why they used connectives differently and what strategies they used to establish cohesion in their writing.

4.2.1. Ping: Qualitative analysis of writing strategies

Global planning

Before she started to write her narrative, Ping skimmed over all 25 pictures in the picture book. She looked at some of them closely and seemed to find a storyline in them. After skimming, she looked at the first picture and thought about the organization of the story, deciding how to organize her narrative and what to write first.

Excerpt 1 (stimulated recall):
    First, I was just skimming the pictures, whole story and what happened.
    Because I want to know what happen next, and in order to know more about the story, I can write the essay.
    I start to how to organize the story and what I have to write first.

Excerpt 2 (stimulated recall):
I was thinking that the little boy went to outside, and I know how to write it.

Local planning

Because every picture included different settings and characters, Ping intermittently stopped writing to observe how the characters and settings changed from one picture to the next, comparing each picture to the previous picture. By matching the pictures with her own story, she planned how to organize the next paragraph in her writing.

Excerpt 3 (stimulated recall):
I stop here because the deer bring him to the place. But I just like brought him to the fountain. Then I was just thinking, and I stopped this paragraph and moved on.

Excerpt 4 (stimulated recall):
I was thinking about how to develop next.

Thematic planning

She did not plan the overall organization of the story in great detail, but instead focused on the grammar and vocabulary for describing each picture. For example, she did not know the words for many of the animals and objects that appeared in the pictures (e.g., a mole, an owl, a beehive, leaves); in such cases, she skipped describing them, instead writing about the entities such as the boy that she did know the words for.

Excerpt 5 (stimulated recall):
I don't know how to write and describe deeply and specifically. Because of the pictures, I didn't know how to describe it. I don't know what animal this is. I skipped it. I don't know how to describe this picture specifically. So I didn't make too much.

Excerpt 6 (stimulated recall):
Because the little boy met, I was like trying to describe how the little boy was thinking. "Satisfied heart." But it's kind of weird to say "satisfied heart" but I think the little boy is satisfied. But I don't know how to describe it.

Translating L1 to L2

In the stimulated recall session, Ping did not mention using her L1 (Chinese), but in the interview, she said that she relied on her L1 to write the narrative essay, explaining that she thought of words in Chinese and translated them into English. Nevertheless, she seemed to struggle to find appropriate vocabulary, as Excerpt 7 demonstrates.

Excerpt 7 (interview):

Because I think article in Chinese, I translate the word in Chinese. So when I have to translate this word into English, I can't find the very good vocabulary fit to my thinking. When I have to write in English, I tried to make some ideas in Chinese, and translate into English.

Rhetorical refining

In the stimulated recall session, Ping talked about struggling with word choices. To refine her vocabulary use, she tried to think of different words to express her ideas. Excerpt 8 shows an example of when she was not sure of her word choices, wondering if she should use "the another day," "the other day," or "tomorrow." Although she wrote "the another day," she did not think it was an appropriate choice for the sentence.

Excerpt 8 (stimulated recall):

I don't know how to use the another day. I just struggling, the other day, the another day and tomorrow.

4.2.2. Ping: Qualitative analysis of writing experience

The semi-structured interview data showed that Ping was aware of her grammar, vocabulary, and organization, which are crucial aspects of writing a narrative. Her retrospective accounts suggest how her awareness of these three factors might affect her writing process and strategies.

Grammar

As Excerpts 9 and 10 demonstrate, Ping was concerned about using grammar appropriately in her narrative writing. In the interview, she mentioned that the most important thing in writing was grammar. Her strong focus on grammar may have made it difficult for her to also focus on organizing her writing.

Excerpt 9 (interview):

Thinking idea is not difficult, but difficult is how you develop article and grammar. I think it's a big problem. Especially, when the past tense and has/have, I just have a big problem with it. Sometimes I know I have a lot of ideas in my mind, but when I have to write down, I don't know how to organize my thoughts.

Excerpt 10 (interview):

I think grammar. I was be careful about past tense.

Vocabulary

As Excerpts 11 and 12 show, Ping seemed to want to improve her vocabulary. She explained she was not able to describe all the pictures in the book, which would have required

her to know and be able to write the words for numerous specific entities. This experience made her feel she lacked vocabulary, and may have made her want to learn more words.

Excerpt 11 (interview):
Because I am not good at English right now, so sometimes writing essay in English cannot fully express how I actually thinking.

Excerpt 12 (interview):
If I know more vocabulary, maybe I can make more descriptions on the way the little boy finds a frog.

Organization

When asked what she focused on during writing, Ping answered that she had focused on transition words such as *finally*. From attending ESL classes, she knew how to connect sentences using transition words. In addition, her comments suggest that she thought about the audience of her writing when she wrote, which inspired her to try to use transition words to make her writing better organized to aid her audience's understanding.

Excerpt 13 (interview):
Transition word like finally. After you want to start the chapter. Because if there is not transition word, readers might be boring. To catch readers' attention.

4.2.3. Keira: Qualitative analysis of writing strategies

Global planning

Keira looked through the first few pages, looking at the first picture closely, before she began writing. As Excerpt 14 shows, she thought about how to start the story, and organized the story based on the first picture.

Excerpt 14 (stimulated recall):
I was looking to see what was still going to be in the story. Just the basics. Starting out a story, once upon a time, but not.

Local planning

As she moved from one picture to the next, Keira tried to plan what to write next. Because some of the pictures include many things (e.g., an owl, a stone, and a tree), she tried to choose which entities to describe and to focus on to find the relationships between contiguous pictures.

Excerpt 15 (stimulated recall):
I was not sure if like that was the owl and the owl was supposed to like—owl was following him out. I was like I am just not going to talk about it and…

Thematic planning

Keira described thinking about the organization of each part of the story as she looked at the pictures, but did not talk about the overall organization. Excerpts 16 and 17 demonstrate that she was planning her writing, but was not sure which objects she wanted to describe or what to describe.

Excerpt 16 (stimulated recall):
I think I was seeing what animals were still there and like why—like should I have made the story about the dog instead of the frog?

Excerpt 17 (stimulated recall):
I was not sure if I should have like described, like it is more of the setting, "Oh, there is a log here." I guess I should mention, like introduce it, instead of just saying behind the log that just showed up. I mean I just kept it like to the minimum, what was actually happening in the surroundings.

Rhetorical refining

Keira was cautious about choosing appropriate verbs. She talked about verbs a lot in the stimulated recall session, and she seemed to feel that verbs were crucial to illustrate and elaborate the characters and the story. She erased words and rewrote words several times as she made her verb or spelling choices.

Excerpt 18 (stimulated recall):
I think I spelled owl wrong. I think I was trying to pick a—like a good verb because I did not know if I should make it more—it is like he went over there and be specific.

4.2.4. Keira: Qualitative analysis of writing experience

Unlike Ping, Keira did not talk about her grammar in the interview session. Instead, she talked more about her word choice and the organization of her writing. Specifically, she was concerned with finding the most appropriate verbs and how to organize the narrative to complete her writing in the given time.

Vocabulary

With respect to vocabulary, Keira placed emphasis on verb choices. Instead of describing peripheral objects and settings, she decided to focus on the details of what the boy (the main character) is doing, as he moves through different settings and looks at different objects; for example, at different points she considered verbs such as *sniffle*, *stretch*, and *climb*.

Excerpt 19 (interview):
I focused on verb choices. It was like just the boy in different settings. So it was instead of like describing the settings, it was like, oh he went, and looked here, and he looked here

but then I noticed that it was like he is looking… But I did not like—I ended up adding all that later because then I realized I already wrote this…

Organization

As Keira describes in Excerpt 20, she focused on the boy's experiences, but also tried to imagine his emotions, as well as connecting the scenes. On the other hand, Excerpt 21 shows that in some ways, her writing was somewhat automatic, because she knows well how to start and end a story. According to Keira, because she has read a lot, she has a template for writing a story. She was therefore able to organize the structure of the story based on the template into which she inserted the contents or story events. However, she also felt that a story based on a template might be boring. In the interview, she said that not only did she not want to think too much about the structure of the story, but she wanted to be detached from it; she wanted to be objective and not show herself in the writing. Using a template helped her to be objective. In addition, due to the fact that the task was timed, she was worried about the time limit, and this concern also led her to stick to the template.

Excerpt 20 (interview):
I sort of flipped through it to see that the boy was there, but then I was just like, okay, I would just describe what he is doing and sometimes interject some emotions. But it was basically like just describing next, next, next until that was mostly when I would be right.

Excerpt 21 (interview):
I mean it was one of those things where it is like just a template in my head because I—the stories all start at the same, they are like this. I did not really have to think about it, and then I had some reasons but like I just logically know this is what happens… I basically followed the template because I don't have to think about something. It is kind of tricky because I find it boring if I stick to the template but it is also easier… And then there was a time limit and I know I was not going over but I was like I just have to keep reading.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Cross-linguistic differences in the use of cohesive devices

This study explores the relationship between writing processes and cohesion in writing, and the differences and similarities between an ESL learner and a native English speaker. Ping used fewer connectives overall than Keira. This finding is in line with those of previous studies that have claimed that more skilled writers tend to use cohesive devices more than unskilled writers (Crossley et al., 2016; Crossley & McNamara, 2012; Kang, 2005, 2009). While Keira used a variety of connectives, Ping had difficulty finding appropriate connectives (Kang, 2009). Ping did not use connectives in the ways that Keira did, particularly for connecting sentences and elaborating ideas. The qualitative analysis of the stimulated recall and interview data showed that, in terms of global planning and local planning strategies, Ping planned the storyline and organization of the story as she looked through all of the

pictures before she began writing and again as she wrote. In spite of her planning, however, her writing was less cohesive than Keira's. In the interview, Ping mentioned that she tried to use transition words in her narratives when writing; however, she lacked a diverse repertoire of transition words. Keira started by looking only at the first few pictures, but she also planned her writing before she began to write and while she wrote by looking at the pictures, and as mentioned, her narrative was more cohesive than Ping's. Ping had learned how to plan narrative writing, but her proficiency and language experience hindered her ability to produce a cohesive piece of writing. These findings are different from those of Kormos (2011), who did not find differences in connective usage between non-native speakers and native speakers. The studies' different findings may be due to the characteristics of their participants, as her participants were bilingual school students who probably had had more L2 input than Ping.

5.2. Writing strategies to establish cohesion

With respect to the process of writing and writing strategies, Ping and Keira seemed to use similar strategies in the sense that they both used global planning, local planning, and thematic planning to organize their narratives. In the global planning stage, Ping spent a few minutes to look at all the pictures whereas Keira looked at the first few pages to start building the structure of the story. But their way of thinking was similar in that they both focused on how to start the story. Furthermore, they both noticed the details in every picture as well as thinking about the connections between the consecutive pictures as they tried to find the relations between each successive picture. Nevertheless, they chose different strategies to describe the pictures and the pictures' connections. Keira used many different connectives because she tried to describe as many objects in the pictures as she could. On the other hand, Ping skipped describing some elements in the pictures, and focused on the main event of the story. These different choices about how to produce the narrative explain why Ping needed fewer connectives than Keira overall (e.g., Hickmann & Hendriks, 1999), but also contributed to the difference in their narratives' cohesion.

Ping also used one strategy that Keira did not, and one strategy differently from Keira. First, Ping frequently translated from L1 to L2, which, as a native English speaker, Keira did not need to do. For instance, Ping relied on her L1 to try to find appropriate vocabulary and articles (Sasaki, 2000; Wang & Wen, 2002). As Sasaki (2000) noted, translating L1 to L2 is a strategy that differentiates English as a Foreign Language (EFL) novice and expert writers, with novices tending to rely on translation more. L2 learners often revert to their L1 to choose vocabulary (Krapels, 1990). In addition, Ping explained in the interview that she tried to think about ideas in Chinese first, and then translate them into English to make her writing coherent. Second, both Ping and Keira used rhetorical refining, but somewhat differently. For instance, Ping used the strategy to try to decide among vocabulary choices (e.g., *the other day, the another day, tomorrow*); even so, she tended to fail to come up with contextually appropriate vocabulary. On the other hand, Keira used the strategy to check her spelling and verbs, with particular attention to using specific rather than general verbs. Their different uses of these strategies show how Ping's and Keira's processes of making their narrative coherent differed.

5.3. Proficiency and discourse competence

In the follow-up interviews, both Ping and Keira talked mostly about vocabulary and organization. The interviews clarify that Ping was motivated to use different strategies than Keira mostly because of her lower English proficiency (Cumming, 2001; Roca de Larios et al., 2008; Sasaki, 2000, 2004). This finding is partly in line with those of Roca de Larios et al. (2008) in that they show that writing processes are to some extent dependent on L2 learners' proficiency, because proficiency affects L2 learners' attentional resources when writing in the L2. In order to make her writing cohesive, Ping knew that she was supposed to consider her audience and use transition words; she had learned this in ESL classes. She therefore intentionally used transition words to try to make her writing cohesive; neverthe-less, her writing lacked detailed descriptions and elaborations of the story. It seems likely that she did not elaborate her writing because she needed to concentrate on grammar (such as the past tense) and vocabulary. In other words, Ping's low proficiency led her to give up on describing details such as the different animals in some pictures, and consequently use fewer connectives when she narrated the scenes in her writing. This suggests that her discourse competence in writing would improve if her proficiency improved. The findings are similar to those of previous studies (e.g., Harman, 2013; Kang 2005; Wei et al., 2020), suggesting that intermediate learners' English written narratives lack some of the characteristic features of written registers because of the challenges of actively using those English-spe-cific features. In contrast, Keira was aware of having a mental template she could use to narrate the story. As a native speaker of English, she had read many English stories, and she knew how to proceed to tell the story. As she mentioned, she was concerned about the time limit for the task, and she wanted to have an objective perspective on her narrative. These two motivations led her to draw on her story template, which contributed to her ability to tell the story coherently. Although employing a template could be considered a common non-native speakers' strategy for writing, Keira strategically chose her template as a "writing frame" for the genre in order to make her writing cohesive within a given time (e.g., Wray & Lewis, 1997).

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study sheds light on certain kinds of cross-linguistic differences in cohesion and why L2 English learners struggle to make their writing coherent. In particular, by qualitatively examining an L2 learner's and a native speaker of English's writing processes, the study has tried to understand their writing strategies and their use of cohesion in their writing. The findings suggest that due to her concerns about grammar and vocabulary, the ESL learner, Ping, was not able to produce a detailed narrative, and therefore focused only on the main story and the main character in the story. Even though she knew about and considered the importance of the organization of the story and the audience, she wrote less coherently compared to Keira, the native speaker.

While this study's findings are suggestive, future studies replicating it, particularly with a larger sample and in different contexts, would contribute to a better understanding of writing strategies and cohesion (Porte, 2012). Examining the writing products and processes

of a diverse population of learners at different L2 proficiency levels would also provide a better sense of the relationship between L2 writing strategies and cohesion.

Nevertheless, this study has its merits as it provides a glimpse of how L1 and L2 writing strategies differ, and of the challenges of constructing cohesion in writing. Building on previous research, this study also underlines that it is crucial for ESL learners to learn to use connectives appropriately. L2 learners tend to focus on grammar and vocabulary, leaving them less attention for organization, even when they understand its importance. Similarly, despite having learned about using cohesive devices such as connectives, they might struggle to use them appropriately. This study's findings suggest that L2 writing classrooms should not neglect explicit instruction on writing strategies to foster learners' ability to organize writing more coherently as well as to develop their discourse competence in writing. Although most L2 writing teachers understand the importance of teaching strategies, this study emphasizes that point further: L2 learners should be given ample opportunities to try out different writing strategies for making their writing cohesive (Wray & Lewis, 1997).

7. REFERENCES

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