The potential role(s) of writing in second language development

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Abstract

Writing is often seen as having a minor role in second language learning. This article explores recent research that suggests that writing can have a facilitative role in language development. In particular, it focuses on three features of writing: (1) its slower pace, and (2) the enduring record that it leaves, both of which can encourage cognitive processes and interactive moves thought to promote language acquisition, and (3) the need for and the opportunity for greater precision in language use, which may encourage learners to consult their explicit knowledge as they plan, monitor, or review their production. Finally, it provides a critical discussion of the role of explicit knowledge in second language learning and second language writing and the central role of the interface in understanding the relationship between them.

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Introduction

Until relatively recently, writing has generally been seen as having a minor role in promoting second language (L2) development. Like other output, it has often been seen as the result of acquisition, rather than as a facilitating factor. It has also been considered perhaps the most distant reflection of the developing interlanguage, with spontaneous oral language a much better approximation. As with the reconsideration of output more generally, writing has now come into focus as an activity that may promote as well as reflect L2 development. In this overview, I will review the various ways in which writing can be seen as facilitative and suggest reasons for why this should be the case.

Writing to learn

Writing and writing instruction have often been viewed within the learning-to-write perspective (see Hyland, 2011, for an overview). Within this more traditional perspective, it is generally the last skill to be learned because it is only when L2 development is well along that L2 writing can be effectively taught. A contrasting perspective is writing-to-learn, which sees writing as a vehicle for learning (Harklau, 2002; Manchón, 2009, 2011a). Manchón (2011a) distinguishes between writing to learn content and writing to learn language. It is the latter that is of concern here.

Within the writing-to-learn perspective, researchers have begun to ask if there is anything unique or special about written output that can facilitate L2 development. One way to explore this question is to focus on the processes of L2 development and examine the impact of writing at different points of development. Housen and Pierrard (2005) divide L2 development into three largely sequential macro-processes. Although they are presented as discrete in Fig. 1, it is more likely that they overlap and influence one another in as yet undetermined ways.

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1. Knowledge internalization: This is an initial step in acquisition when learners establish form-meaning connections as a result of noticing and processing selected input.
2. Knowledge modification: After initial form-meaning connections are made, learners continue to elaborate and refine them in response to additional input and negative feedback.
3. Knowledge consolidation: Learners strengthen their L2 knowledge through repeated retrieval and deeper processing, increasing their fluency in the use of their knowledge and their ability to use it more broadly.

A growing body of research has shown that output can play an important role in all of these processes (Fortune, 2005; Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Lapkin, Swain, & Smith, 2002; Swain, 1998, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1995; Toth, 2006). For example, studies by Swain and her colleagues (Swain, 1998, 2000, 2006; Swain & Lapkin, 1995, 2002; Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2005) suggest that output can affect early stages of acquisition (knowledge internalization). In addition, a number of recent studies that have looked at the impact of different output tasks on global measures of proficiency (Housen & Kuiken, 2009) suggest an impact on forms that are already part of the developing system (knowledge modification and consolidation). Increasing fluency is probably the least controversial claim for output. It is widely accepted that repeated retrieval and deployment of knowledge—output practice—can lead to automatization and consolidation of knowledge (DeKeyser, 2007b). The following discussion is therefore limited to the more controversial role for writing in the creation and restructuring of L2 knowledge.

The macro-processes identified by Housen and Pierrard (2005) make a good starting point for exploring the effects of written production, but they are somewhat broad for empirical investigation. They can be broken down into sub-processes, some of which crosscut the macro-processes (see Fig. 1). As with the macro-processes, although they appear separately in the figure, they undoubtedly overlap. These are also by no means the only sub-process that have been suggested in L2 research, but taken together, they constitute the main areas of research that provide insight into the impact of writing on L2 development.

The research questions below take as their point of departure the acknowledgement that output in general does contribute to language learning and narrow the focus to the impact of written production more specifically.

1. Does written production offer any advantages over oral production for L2 development?
2. Does writing facilitate specific learning processes and if so, how?

There have been relatively few direct studies directly comparing written and oral production, but their number has recently been increasing. Although the results of some of these studies are conflicting, I will argue that for those that demonstrate a facilitative effect for written production, results can be traced directly or indirectly to two inherent features of writing: (1) its permanence and (2) the slower pace at which it occurs in comparison to speaking (see Fig. 2). These two features permit more learner control over attentional resources as well as more need and opportunity to attend to language both during and after production.

Unfortunately, the latter feature, slower pace, also introduces a design challenge for researchers. Because writing takes longer than speaking, it inevitably results in longer time on task. To attempt to equalize the time on task between oral and written production, however, would remove the inherent benefit for writing proposed here, and vitiate any true comparison between the two modes of production. Webb (2005) makes similar arguments for the comparison of reading and writing tasks, that is, that equalizing time on these tasks detracts from their authenticity. Thus, I suggest that the longer time required for written production simply be accepted as an artifact of the modality. These two
features, or conditions that result from them (for example, the opportunity to plan or review production) will be recurrent themes as I review the sub-processes of L2 development.

Finally, it is important to note that some of the claims that are reported for written production should more properly be claimed for writing instruction. For example, many studies of writing examine the interaction and negotiation among writers during text reconstruction or pre-writing activities, and it is this interaction, rather than the act of writing itself, that may be facilitative of language development. Throughout the review, I will try to keep these two claims distinct.

**Knowledge internalization: noticing input and shaping intake**

Some claims for the value of writing are a version of the claims for the role of output more generally, but they may be stronger for written production due to the more generous time constraints and permanent record of writing. During both types of output, learners may find themselves unable to reach their communicative goals because of their lack of knowledge of the L2. While writing, however, they may have more opportunity to *notice holes* (Swain, 1998) in their L2, which can be registered only fleetingly in spoken interaction. In speaking, such holes may prompt learners to scan future input for the forms to fill them. In writing, however, learners may have an opportunity to resolve their communication problems immediately by consulting experts, reference materials, or simply reflecting on their explicit knowledge during the composing process itself. Yang and Zhang (2010), in a study of L2 composing and reformulation, report that learners noticed many of these holes during the composing stage and were primed to look for ways to solve their composing problems when they reread their writing as reformulated by native speakers.

Reformulation is a pedagogical technique that provides a special kind of input. Writers compare their original work with a new version that has been reformulated by a native speaker, and subsequently revise their own work. It provides immediate and focused input where learners can find ways to resolve their communication problems. In other words, reformulation can influence noticing and shape intake by helping learners to *notice the gap* (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Swain, 1998) between their own production and the target language. Based on the results of their study, Swain and Lapkin suggest that reformulation “is an effective technique for stimulating noticing and reflection on language” (2002, p. 298). Results of this and other reformulation studies indicate that when learners have an opportunity to

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**Fig. 2.** Inherent features of written production and their effects.
compare their work to relevant input, their texts and the language in them generally improve. Qi and Lapkin (2001) maintain that it is the quality of noticing engendered by reformulation that improves subsequent production. Specifically, they claim that deeper processing of noticed input, which they operationalize as providing reasons for revision, is more likely to lead to learning. In a follow-up study, Adams (2003) isolated the effects of reformulation from repetition and found that reformulation led to more noticing than repetition alone. Sachs and Polio (2007) compared reformulation to error correction and found the latter resulted in more noticing but that reformulation was superior to the control condition. Furthermore, they found that the noticing stimulated by reformulation was related to revision. Hanoaka (2007) found writers were more likely to scan reformulated models for solutions to problems that they had identified for themselves during output, and make revisions in accordance with these suggestions, than to make revisions of problems identified by the native speakers who reformulated the models. As a whole, the studies (see also Hanoaka & Izumi, in this issue) suggest that the act of writing, which prompts learners to reflect on holes in their knowledge and primes them to focus on specific aspects of future input, combined with the pedagogical technique of reformulation, which provides tailored input and potential resolutions to composing problems, promotes noticing and at least short-term changes in language production. Tocalli-Beller and Swain (2005) note that the cognitive conflict created by this comparison of written learner output and reformulated input prompts a level of noticing and reflection that would not be possible in spoken interaction.

Reformulation tasks provide tailored input. In contrast, repetition tasks provide no new input. Learners simply have an opportunity to write a second draft in response to the same prompt after a period of time. This would seem to be a purer test of the impact of the act of writing alone. For the learners who were asked to revise their original draft without the benefit of feedback in a study by Polio, Fleck, and Leder (1998), simply having a second opportunity to complete the tasks led to improvement. Again, this is likely to be linked to the two salient features of written production. During revision, learners are able to access their explicit L2 knowledge and notice the gap between it and their first draft production. Thus, although some of these claims are applicable to output more generally, other facilitating effects may be specific to written output.

Different aspects of language acquisition may benefit unequally from the facilitating effects of written production. The writers in Hanoaka’s (2007) reformulation study overwhelmingly noticed the lexical changes in the reformulated models. Within vocabulary research, the Involvement Load Hypothesis suggests that certain task characteristics are more likely to promote lexical acquisition than others (Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001; Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). The specific claim of the hypothesis is that tasks with a high involvement index, that is, high values for need (i.e., the need to know a word), search (i.e., an attempt to find the write word to match desired meaning), and evaluation (i.e., the comparison of word with other candidates for appropriateness) are more likely to promote acquisition. Perhaps because it is generally assumed that most incidental lexical learning takes place during reading, Involvement Load studies have compared reading and writing tasks, rather than speaking and writing tasks. Writing tasks in these studies generally are assigned the highest involvement index. One study compared two reading tasks and a writing task, ascribing the highest involvement load to the writing task (Kim, 2008). The group that was assigned the writing task was the most successful in the initial noticing and learning of new words but she found no significant difference in retention rates. The post-test used in this study was the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale (VKS), which is particularly sensitive to levels of noticing. Thus, in vocabulary learning, as in language development more generally, written production may have a positive affect, particularly on initial stages of acquisition. Keating (2008) and Pichette, Serres, and LaFontaine (2012) had similar results: A writing task, assigned a higher involvement index than reading tasks, yielded higher word recall scores, but that effect faded with time.

Creation of new L2 knowledge

Up to this point, this review has explored an indirect role for writing on L2 development, that is, on noticing input and shaping intake. However, perhaps the most fundamental question in language learning is whether knowledge can actually be created as a result of production processes. Indeed, it has been claimed that a direct influence for output—oral or written—on this first stage in L2 development is not possible (e.g., VanPatten, 2007). In Fig. 1, knowledge creation is shown as crosscutting the knowledge initialization and restructuring processes because it can be seen as part of both of these macro-processes.

The evidence that writing can facilitate knowledge creation is growing. First, there is some evidence that it is possible for learners to co-construct knowledge, usually documented as increased target-like use, when they
participate in scaffolded or collaborative tasks. Together learners may create new knowledge (either initial or restructured knowledge) not uniquely held by any one of them prior to the task (Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Storch, 1999, 2001; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Swain & Lapkin, 2002; Wigglesworth & Storch, in this issue). In many of the studies that demonstrate this, the new knowledge creation is prompted by collaborative tasks that involve writing. Surely, writing is not a requirement for this to occur, but to the extent that the permanent record left by writing increases the demand for attention to formal language features, writing would seem to provide the ideal environment for such co-constructed knowledge.

The first step in knowledge co-construction is reflection. As noted earlier, writers have the opportunity to consult their explicit knowledge in making composing decisions. However, collaborative activity is a more effective way to create new knowledge than solitary activity because collaboration involves the pooling of knowledge from several sources, as well as interactional moves thought to facilitate language learning. Several studies have directly compared writers working alone and together, and most have found a superior result for the latter, particularly as regards accuracy (Brooks & Swain, 2009; Kuiken & Vedder, 2005; Nassaji & Tian, 2010; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007).

Second, it is possible that production during collaboration pushes learners toward a reprocessing and repackaging of implicit knowledge (Brooks & Swain, 2009; Swain & Lapkin, 1995; Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki, & Brooks, 2009). Swain (2006) refers to this as languaging —using production to mediate cognitively complex ideas. Learners may use production processes to analyze implicit knowledge that exists as chunks stored in long-term memory, make it more explicit and available for use, and finally, to use it in more systematic and creative ways (DeBot, 1996; R. Ellis, 2003; Toth, 2006).

The existence of these two kinds of L2 knowledge—explicit/analyzed knowledge and implicit/unanalyzed knowledge—is generally accepted. The existence or nature of the interface between these two types of knowledge, in contrast, is much more controversial. Since I have argued that writing encourages learners to consult their explicit knowledge and that collaborative activities can encourage analysis of implicit knowledge, the interface question becomes central to the discussion of the impact of writing on L2 development. Can the creation, retrieval, or use of explicit knowledge result in a change to the developing L2 system? In a recent discussion of the interface, N. Ellis maintains that the bulk of L2 research points to a conclusion that explicit knowledge (often a result of explicit instruction) can indeed become implicit. Furthermore, he specifically names output processes as a pathway for doing so. He notes that during production, “the learner can use explicit knowledge to consciously construct an utterance into working memory... whose subsequent usage can promote implicit learning” (2011, p. 44).

Focus on form

Focus on form refers to “an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features – by the teacher and/or one or more students” (Long & Robinson, 1998, p. 23). Crucially, it also includes a concurrent, or nearly concurrent, focus on meaning. In a precursor argument to the focus on form perspective, Swain (1985) pointed out that the encoding demands of output play an important role in acquisition. The term pushed output is based on this need to encode form as well as meaning when learners speak or write. In contrast, when learners listen or read, the input may be processed simply for comprehension but not for acquisition (Mondria, 2003; Van Beuningen, 2010). For these reasons, it has been claimed that production processes require greater attention to form-meaning connections in the input than comprehension processes, as well as real-time syntactic encoding of those connections in output (R. Ellis, 2003; Erlam, Loewen, & Philip, 2009; Swain, 1998; Toth, 2006). In short, output can promote focus on form.

These observations pertain to output in general. However, several recent studies suggest that the act of writing naturally entails both a greater need and a better opportunity for focus on form than does speaking (Ortega, 2005, 2010; Schoonen, Snellings, Stevenson, & van Gelderen, 2009). According to Bulté and Housen (2009), writing is 5–8 times slower than speaking. An important consequence of this additional time is that writers can plan. As Kuiken and Vedder state, “the writer has the possibility to stop the grapho-motoric process and to concentrate only on either retrieval or on planning processes” (2011, p. 92). Much of the early work on task effects of planning was within the limited capacity model (Skehan, 1998), which is based on the idea that the brain has only so much capacity to assign to tasks at any one time. Therefore, increased planning time is expected to free up attentional resources to focus on specific aspects of production, such as increased accuracy or the use of a recently acquired form. A competing model, the Cognitive Hypothesis (Robinson, 2001, 2007) suggests that there are multiple pools of attentional resources. Within this model, there is no tradeoff among these aspects of production if task complexity increases, provided that the complexity
increases along resource-directing dimensions. Resource-directing features of task complexity can connect learners’ cognitive resources, such as attention and memory, with linguistic resources, thus pushing language development. Such tasks potentially enhance several aspects of production at the same time, for example, complexity and accuracy. Indeed, increasing complexity in writing tasks along this dimension has been shown to result in better performance, in terms of accuracy, and lexical and syntactic complexity (Kuiken & Vedder, 2007, 2008; Zhang, 1987). Lack of planning time, in contrast, is thought to result in a dispersion of attentional resources; in this, Robinson’s and Skehan’s models are in agreement.

The studies on the effects of planning on written production specifically have yielded mixed results, but a variety of studies have shown that learners express themselves more fluently and use more complex and varied forms in their production when they have time to plan their writing. Ellis and Yuan (2004, 2005) demonstrated that the opportunity for pre-task planning was the crucial factor in allowing learners to include new and more complex forms in their production. Ellis (2009) suggests that this opportunity for strategic planning can promote IL restructuring.

More important for our discussion is the effect of modality on attention to form. How do learners use additional planning time available in writing tasks? Writing may allow or even encourage the deployment of explicit, or even metalinguistic, L2 knowledge, which may not be available to them while speaking (R. Ellis, 2003; Schoonen et al., 2009; Wolff, 2000). Schoonen et al. (2009) note that “requirements of adequacy are felt more strongly in written language than spoken language, the latter generally being more tolerant of ‘errors’ or sloppy wording” (pp. 79–80). In short, writing seems to demand a greater level of precision than speech. Wolff maintains that it is this demand for precision that promotes language awareness, making writing a driver in language development. Writing “calls for constant interaction with linguistic knowledge...” (that learners)... already have; in calling up this knowledge, they probably restructure it and thus make it better available for further use” (2000, p. 219). Yet the results of studies that have compared written and oral production have been mixed, especially regarding accuracy. Some studies have found higher accuracy in written production than in speaking (Ellis, 1987; Kormos, 2012). Others have found the opposite (Granfeldt, 2008) or no difference (Kuiken & Vedder, 2011). There is also a lack of consensus on measures of syntactic complexity and lexical variety (Lu, 2011; Norris & Ortega, 2009).

So, it seems that direct comparisons of written and oral production have yet to capture any consistent advantage for writing. Intermediate processes, rather than the written production itself, may provide a better way to observe how focus on form is accomplished in writing and through writing instruction. Much of the focus on form literature is closely identified with two processes: negotiated interaction and corrective feedback. There is considerable evidence, already discussed in the section on knowledge creation, that the negotiation that often occurs during collaborative pre-writing activities can increase interactional moves thought to facilitate language learning (Brooks & Swain, 2009; Kuiken & Vedder, 2005; Niu, 2009; Storch, 1999; Storch & Wiglesworth, 2007; Wiglesworth & Storch, 2009; see also Wiggleworth & Storch, in this issue).

The focus of much of the research on negotiation has been on how it can help learners notice the gap between their own production and the target, suggesting that the impact of this aspect of focus on form is on knowledge restructuring. Many of these investigations have used as their dependent variable, Language Related Episodes (LREs) or Form-Focused Episodes (FFEIs), that is, occasions in which learners reflect on and/or discuss language as object. One study (Niu, 2009) directly compared the amount of focus on form generated by oral and written collaborative tasks. Niu found that writing tasks generated more LREs, and more turns that focused on form. Interestingly, this effect held, even allowing for the longer time on task for writing. Adams (2006) had similar results comparing LREs in speaking and writing tasks. Adams and Ross-Feldman (2008) found that the addition of a written output task to a spoken task resulted in increased learner focus on form during interaction as well as more accurate output.

**Processing and responding to feedback**

The second major research area in focus on form is response to negative feedback. Polio and Bitchener (in this issue) discuss this body of research in greater detail, so the treatment here will be brief. There is an ongoing controversy regarding the impact of corrective feedback on language development in general, and more specifically, about the relative effectiveness of different types of feedback. A similar controversy is evident in writing research, specifically, the effects of written corrective feedback on language development (Ferris, 2010; Truscott, 2007; see also Bitchener, in this issue; Polio, in this issue; Van Beuningen, 2010, for reviews). The two features of writing emerge again as important here. Unlike more fleeting oral feedback, written feedback provides a permanent record for learners.
to compare to their own written production. Response to written corrective feedback can also takes place at a slower pace than response to oral negative feedback.

Most studies of the effect of written corrective feedback have relied on short-term measures, that is, revisions made by learners in the texts on which they received the corrective feedback, what Manchón (2011b) calls “feedback for accuracy.” Many researchers have argued that the ability to apply the knowledge acquired from feedback on an earlier writing task to new writing tasks would be more convincing evidence that development has occurred (Bruton, 2009; Truscott, 2004, 2007; Van Beuningen, 2010; see also Polio, in this issue). Manchón (2011b) calls this “feedback for acquisition.”

Several studies claim that it is possible to provide feedback for acquisition; that is, they have demonstrated positive results for corrective feedback with longer-term measures (Bitchener & Knoch, 2010a, 2010b; Chandler, 2003; Sheen, 2007). These studies have generally had a very narrow focus on a single linguistic structure (e.g., article use) and have involved intensive and sustained corrective feedback on that structure, leading to criticism that learners were likely aware of the study’s focus. Participants may perceive the post-treatment tasks as grammar tests and consequently, the results may not reflect real change in the developing L2. Although most have shown robust effects for the feedback treatment on accuracy, without more global measures of development or even of accuracy, it is difficult to know whether participants’ attention was so focused on the target structure that their accuracy on other structures suffered (see Xu, 2009 for a critical discussion). Just a few studies have investigated the effects of the more pedagogically plausible unfocused corrective feedback (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima, 2008; Hartshorn et al., 2010; Truscott & Hsu, 2008; Van Beuningen, De Jong, & Kuiken, 2008, 2012). Of these, only Truscott and Hu found no effect for corrective feedback.

Few studies have made direct comparisons between oral and written corrective feedback on written production. One recent exception is Sheen (2010), a study of the impact of oral and written feedback on accuracy of article production. Sheen found that the explicitness of the feedback was a better predictor of this impact on performance than modality. However, within the comparison of implicit feedback, written reformulations were more effective than oral ones (i.e., recasts) in improving learners’ performance on a variety of immediate and delayed post-tests. The author speculates that learners may not recognize the corrective force of oral recasts whereas written recasts are more difficult to ignore.

Truscott (2004, 2007) has maintained that corrective feedback is ineffective. Again, we return to the crucial interface issue. Does apparently successful corrective feedback simply encourage learners to tap into existing explicit knowledge? Truscott assumes that doing so will have only a superficial effect and will have no impact on language development. If, however, there is an interface between explicit and implicit knowledge, as N. Ellis contends, then retrieving and using explicit knowledge in response to corrective feedback may facilitate L2 development indirectly, even if it has no direct affect as Truscott contends. The issue still requires empirical verification in future studies.

**Hypothesis testing**

One of the general functions of output posited by Swain (1998) is that learners use their own production to test out their L2 hypotheses and based on their success, modify them. Applying this notion more specifically to writing, Manchón (2011b; Manchón & Roca de Larios, 2011) shows how learners use the writing process to try out new structures. Weissberg (2000, 2006) has also documented the emergence of some forms in written production prior to oral production. Because writing leaves a permanent record, writers can try out their hypotheses in ways that can be monitored, reviewed, and compared to future input (Ellis, 2003; Schoonen et al., 2009; Tocalli-Beller & Swain, 2005). This cognitive comparison between forms, which is often described in L2 research as conducive to learning, is available for reflection and study. If writing instruction includes direct feedback or reformulation, the comparison can be quite explicit.

One reason for the success of hypothesis testing in writing may be that it places a lower demand on working memory than hypothesis testing in speaking. Doughty (2001) has suggested that working memory may explain the success of (oral) recasts. Recasts are contingent; that is, they are offered within a cognitive window in which the learner’s output can be compared with an interlocutor’s reformulation. Processing information in this cognitive window depends crucially on working memory.

Recent research into the role of working memory in SLA has focused on the extent to which it might account for individual differences in success. An important finding is that differences in working memory may affect noticing
(Mackey, Philp, Egi, Fuji, & Tatsumi, 2002; Sagarra, 2008; Trofimovich, Ammar, & Gatbonton, 2007) as well as learners’ ability to respond to feedback (Mackey, Adams, Stafford, & Winke, 2002). What connection might this have to writing? Given that most writing occurs without the same time pressure as conversation, one would expect the role of working memory to be less significant in writing tasks (see Kormos, in this issue). Schoonen et al. (2009) describe the written page as a temporary extension of working memory although they caution that limitations on memory remain even in the context of writing. Kuiken and Vedder (2011) suggest that learners may use time to retrieve knowledge from long-term memory. It is probably safe to say that the cognitive window is open somewhat wider and learners have a richer opportunity to test their hypotheses when they write than when they speak. They can make cognitive comparisons between their output and feedback at their own pace. This, in part, may also explain the success of reformulation as a pedagogical technique.

Finally there may be an affective advantage for testing hypotheses in writing. The written mode can be a lower-stakes arena in which to test out emergent forms. It is often less public than speaking, and because it is offline, offers an opportunity to edit. The participant in a study by Lam (2000) stated that he felt safer trying out new forms in writing first before using them in spoken interaction.

Conclusion

In summary, recent research suggests that writing, because of its pace and the permanence of its record, may aid in L2 development at several possible points: first, at the point of noticing and input processing, then, soon after the initial point of acquisition, as learners try out new and more complex forms, or familiar forms in new contexts, and finally, later in the process, as learners retrieve and use forms over which they do not yet have full control—in other words, in knowledge internalization, modification, and consolidation. The demand for precision and the opportunity to meet this demand stem from the two features that differentiate writing from other forms of language use. The permanent written record pushes learners to demand more of themselves regarding language form and the extended time gives them the opportunity to meet this demand, often with the help of their explicit knowledge. If much of what is useful about writing for L2 development revolves around the opportunity for learners to access explicit knowledge as they write, then the question of whether or not such knowledge can become part of the developing L2 system is a fundamental one. DeKeyser (2001, 2007a) notes the importance of having the declarative knowledge available for inspection in the initial stages of acquisition. These are precisely the conditions that may be present during composing. Clearly, writing is not crucial to second language learning in all contexts, but it has the potential to play a positive role. If we accept the possibility of the conversion of explicit to implicit knowledge, the potential impact of writing on L2 development increases considerably.

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