Book review:
First Language versus Foreign Language

Breuer, E. O. (2015). *First language versus foreign language. Fluency, errors and revision processes in foreign language academic writing* [Textproduktion und Medium]. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang | ISBN-13: 9783631646984

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Writing in a foreign language is no easy feat. To describe the challenging process of writing in a foreign language, Esther Odilia Breuer uses the metaphor of boxing: the writer's mind is a boxing ring in which the writer's training, flexibility and endurance are crucial to regulating the battle between the cognitive processes and to dodging the 'punches' of the first language (L1) to the foreign language (FL). This fight for dominance between the L1 and the FL is the central topic of Breuer's doctoral dissertation, which has recently been published by Peter Lang as a volume in the Textproduktion und Medium series (Eds. Eva-Maria Jakobs and Dagmar Knorr). In First language versus foreign language, Breuer aims to examine "when, how and in which areas the battle between the L1 and the FL takes place, which methods [writers] use in order to shield the 'attacks' of the L1, and when they fail and have to take a strike" (Chapter 1, p. 4).

The book contains a detailed contrastive analysis of L1 and FL writing processes and products, in which Breuer focuses on three aspects known to be problematic in FL writing: (1) fluency, (2) errors, and (3) revision. In addition, Breuer examines how these aspects are interrelated. To gain more insight into the L1-initiated 'attacks' on the FL (i.e., negative transfer from the L1 on the FL), Breuer analyses errors and revisions using a comprehensive classification system of node-switches, code-switches, content, typing

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and other errors. The classification system is based on the Bilingual Tripartite (or Parallel) Architecture, a theoretical model that Breuer has developed to describe and to interpret the processes that take place in bilingual language production.

The book consists of six chapters. After the Introduction, Breuer explains her Bilingual Tripartite Architecture in Chapter 2 and reviews the existing literature on aspects of L1 and FL writing that are central to her study in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 contains a description of the study design and of the methods used for data collection and data analysis. Breuer reports the results regarding productivity and fluency, errors and revisions in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 respectively, and triangulates the major findings in the concluding chapter (Chapter 8).

Theoretical framework

Breuer's Bilingual Tripartite (or Parallel) Architecture is based on a 'wholistic' view of multilinguality, which follows the premise that the bilingual is a "fully competent speaker-hearer" and that two or more languages can be used either separately or in a mixed form (Chapter 2, p. 23). The Bilingual Tripartite Architecture is inspired by Jackendoff's (monolingual) Tripartite Architecture and consists of three independent components (phonology, syntax and semantics). The phonological structure as well as the syntactical structure are language-dependent and thus exist in both the L1 and the FL. In contrast, the semantic or conceptual structure is considered language-independent. In this model of bilingual language production, none of the three structures is considered dominant. Instead, the structures work parallel to each other and are interrelated via two-way interfaces. The interfaces exist not only between structures within one language (e.g., L1 phonological structure - L1 syntactical structure) but also between the two languages (e.g., L1 phonological structure - FL phonological structure) and across the structures of the two languages (e.g., L1 phonological structure - FL syntactic structures). The language-independent conceptual structure is interrelated with all structures. Within the Bilingual Tripartite Architecture, the bilingual lexicon is considered a single system and not two separate lexicons, as is the case in Francis's (2004) Bilingual Tripartite Parallel Architecture. This bilingual lexicon is not activated prior to the syntactical and phonological structures (as is the case in Francis's model), but works in parallel to these structures serving as an interface. The Bilingual Tripartite Architecture can be extended to a quadripartite architecture when L1 and FL orthographic structures are added to the system.

In other words, Breuer's Bilingual Tripartite Architecture is a dynamic system, in which L1 and FL rules and items are active at the same time and all structures of language influence each other. This complex network allows Breuer to describe and to explain the 'attacks' of the L1 on the FL (but also the influence of the FL on the L1). In FL writing, the interface to the FL is the preferred interface, but due to the parallel activation of the FL and the L1, there is competition between the linguistic structures for execution. Therefore, it is possible that the L1 takes over and throws a mean punch at

the FL. This influence of the L1 on the FL may appear in the form of complete words in the other language (code-switches): 'Yesterday, I met the new *decano* [dean] and he was very *simpático* [friendly]'. The L1 influence can also be more subtle: node-switches are errors that are not complete code-switches but that reflect the use of a wrong interface, resulting in a phonological, syntactic or orthographic L1 structure becoming dominant in an FL utterance (or vice versa). To illustrate how node-switching works, Breuer provides the following sentence, which has been written by a German-English bilingual speaker in an academic setting: "I laughed because the joke funny was" (p. 43). English is the language chosen in the conceptual structure and the phonological structure is also activated and executed in English. However, the conjunction 'because' has activated the syntactic rules of the German equivalent 'weil', which requires the verb to take final position in the subordinate clause in formal written German. This particular example is a syntactic node-switch, but node-switches can appear in many forms. Breuer distinguishes phonological, orthographic, punctuation, syntactic, semantic and genre node-switches. Although node-switches and code-switches can be used intentionally, they are most often considered the (unintentional) results of low FL proficiency, cognitive overload and the writer's inability to control or to reduce L1 activation.

Methodological framework

Breuer uses the theoretical framework above to describe and to interpret the writing processes and the products of ten German students of English philology (enrolled on average for 7.6 semesters in higher education). The students were asked to write five essays: one simple essay (in the FL) and four academic essays (two in the L1 and two in the FL). The students were also asked to use different planning strategies for their academic essays: in each language, note-taking in one essay and freewriting in the other essay. This led to the following task sequence: SE (simple essay), L1N (German academic essay using the note-taking planning strategy), FLN (English academic essay using note-taking), L1F (German academic essay using the freewriting planning technique) and FLF (English academic essay using freewriting). This intervention in planning was used to study the effects of planning strategies in the L1 and the FL, but also to test whether a particular planning strategy can weaken the influence of the L1 in FL writing.

The data collection and data analysis are characterized by a triangulated approach. Data were collected using computer keystroke logging, questionnaires and retrospective interviews. The data analysis consists of a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis of both process data and product data. With regard to the process data, Breuer focuses on three aspects: (1) productivity, (2) fluency and (3) revisions. Productivity is analysed through final text length and the number of words and characters produced, the time on task, the distribution of time across the writing processes, and a comparison of pausing and active writing time. Fluency is studied by

examining bursts, and in particular the number of bursts, the average number of words and characters per burst, pause and revision bursts, and the position of burst ends. Foci of the revision analysis are the number of revisions and the number of characters that were produced without revisions, the types of revision and of 'double' revisions, the distribution of revisions over writing processes as well as over P-bursts and R-bursts. The classification system of node-switches, code-switches, content, typing and other errors is used for the revision analysis as well as for the product analysis (i.e., the error analysis). The error analysis is centred on the errors in the plans and in the final texts (quantity, types of error, distribution of errors over error types).

Results

The rich research design allows Breuer to examine the battle between the L1 and the FL from at least three perspectives: (1) L1 vs FL writing, (2) note-taking vs freewriting planning within and across the L1 and the FL, and (3) the influence of the L1 in FL writing (and vice versa). Furthermore, it enables her to study the interrelation between process and product measures within these perspectives.

In Breuer's study, both language and planning seem to influence productivity and fluency. Productivity in the L1 was higher than in the FL, resulting in longer text lengths, higher production rates and higher processing speed (i.e., time on task/text length ratio as well as more active writing time). The freewriting planning strategy appears to have an enhancing effect on productivity, although this effect was more pronounced in the L1. A clear effect of language and planning on the distribution of time among the writing processes could not be established because of high intra-individual differences. Fluency was also positively influenced by planning: in the freewriting condition, the number of bursts was lower and burst length was higher during the planning and formulation processes. The lower number of P-bursts and the higher number of R-bursts than those taking place in the note-taking condition seemed to confirm this pattern. An effect of language on fluency was detectable for burst length in the formulation process alone (and only when measured in characters) and this effect was also stronger in the L1. These findings suggest that productivity and fluency is higher in the L1. Nevertheless, the freewriting planning strategy seems an effective method in both languages to help writers to interact more with the text to be produced and to avoid a slowing-down of their processing. However, the error analysis showed that the higher processing speed that is stimulated by freewriting did not necessarily influence the linguistic quality of the final texts in a positive manner, and thus calls for a more intense revision process.

Language and planning also play important roles in performance errors. The number of errors in the academic essays was higher in the FL than in the L1, but the simple FL texts contained relatively fewer errors than the L1 academic essays. According to Breuer, this not only illustrates the L1 writing deficiencies of the participants but also suggests that the writers experience the academic genre as another

'foreign language', even in the L1 writing context. How the L1 'attacks' the FL was showcased in the types of errors that were made in the FL plans and final texts, since most of the errors were node-switches and thus implied negative transfer from the L1 to the FL. The strength of this influence of the L1 differed between the FL plans and final texts, but also between the planning conditions. The FL note-taking plans contained relatively more errors than the FL freewriting plans, but this negative impact did not always transfer to the formulation process. The effect of planning strategy on final text quality seemed to differ among the individual writers, which could be caused by the writers' preferred writing styles in the L1 and in the FL (Mozartians vs Beethovians), as Breuer suggests. Nevertheless, the planning strategies seemed to trigger specific node-switches, since some errors (e.g., syntactic node-switches) were more frequent in the freewriting condition than in the note-taking condition, and vice versa (e.g., genre node-switches). Breuer argues that these findings show that linguistic information is stored primarily in the form of rules and that the planning strategies activate the interfaces between the conceptual and the phonological, orthographic and syntactic structures in a different manner.

Revision was also influenced by language as well as planning, but it is important to note that in Breuer's study, the time spent on final revision was relatively limited. That being said, the revision rate (regarding characters produced) was lower in the L1 than in the FL, and higher in planning by note-taking than freewriting. The rate of revisions in the final texts was highest in the FL note-taking condition, which may be caused by the lack of or lower stimulation of FL formulation, by increased L1 use during planning and by the subsequent difficulty in finding FL words during the formulation process. The effect of the planning strategy on revision was less strong in the FL than in the L1: the participants made use in the FL of the monitoring methods they were familiar with, whereas they showed more flexibility in monitoring in the L1. The battle between the L1 and the FL came to light not only in the error analysis but also in the revision analysis. The participants seemed to have difficulty detecting L1 influence while writing in the FL. With the exception of orthographic node-switch revisions, the revisions that the participants carried out in their FL plans and final texts were predominantly language-independent mistakes, such as typing and content errors. However, it did appear that the participants were more successful in detecting L1 influence on FL writing in the freewriting condition during planning than while formulating and revising.

My opinion

Transforming a doctoral dissertation into an accessible book is challenging, but Breuer has managed to create a text that is easy to read and well structured. The links between the theoretical chapters and the chapters about the practical study are visualized in a clever overview right before the start of the results chapters. Each of these results

chapters begins with a brief repetition of the hypotheses and ends with a summary of the main findings, which further increases text cohesion.

The book is extremely rich in information. The study design is meticulously described and the choices made in the task design and the error and revision classification system are well documented. The data analysis and the reporting of results are very detailed, but perhaps too detailed for the chosen publication format. For example, the discussion of all error and revision types regardless of their frequency makes it is easy for the reader to lose track of the most important findings. The choice to use only descriptive statistics (given the small sample size) is another factor that obstructs a clear insight into the actual effects of language and planning on the product and process measures. Non-parametric statistical analyses would have provided more insight. Another methodological aspect that could be refined in further research is the reliability of the coding of the errors and revisions. In Breuer's study, this is carried out by the researcher herself, but it would be worth considering asking a panel of multiple coders to assess the errors and revisions instead.

For me, a translation scholar who has recently taken her first steps into the world of writing-process research, this book was an extremely interesting read. Most of the existing literature on L1 and FL writing addresses differences in either process execution or text characteristics. Only a few studies (e.g., Van Weijen, 2008) have tackled the relation between product and process measures in L1 and FL writing. Breuer delivers on her promise to begin closing this gap, introducing simultaneously another factor into the contrastive L1-FL process-product mix: the effect of planning.

Another notable contribution of this book is that it gives systematic empirical evidence of when and in which form the 'L1 attacks' in the FL writing take place. It is a well-known fact that the L1 can play a negative (as well as a positive) role in FL writing. However, using an intelligently designed error and revision classification system, Breuer manages to make the 'L1 attacks' in FL writing visible and comparable between tasks. Moreover, Breuer's Bilingual Tripartite Architecture appears to be a useful model to try to interpret how and why the 'L1 attacks' take place. However, the actual strengths and weaknesses of this model could have been discussed in more detail by systematically reviewing how the findings of the study support *and* contradict the premises on which the model and its components are based. Nonetheless, *First language versus foreign language* is an insightful book, with a great number of ideas that can be further explored in writing didactics and future L1-FL writing studies. Therefore, I would recommend it to writing teachers and researchers alike, but also to scholars from my own field of translation, since the L1 is known to throw punches in translation into the FL as well.

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