

# Japanese ESL students' revising processes in academic writing

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## Abstract

Much previous research into the revision strategies used by L1 and L2 writers has been conducted in experimental-like settings rather than naturally occurring situations. This research has sought to highlight the visible aspects of what writers are doing during revision, as opposed to the invisible aspects of how they perceive their own behaviors, and has often focused on the differences between skilled and less-skilled writers. Results of this research often conclude that skilled writers revise consistently and extensively while less-skilled writers tend to concentrate on surface or mechanical features. As yet, little attention has been given to writers' perceptions of their own revision activities and revision strategies, that is, how writers interpret what they are doing during the act of revision. Considering the fact that different writers have different writing experiences and strategies, the investigation of individual writers' perceptions of their own behaviors should be more effective than just analyzing the differences between proficient and novice writers. This analysis should also be helpful in terms of the diagnosis of each writer's strengths and weaknesses. The present study investigates the revision strategies of three Japanese ESL students as well as their perceptions and awareness of their revising activities in natural academic writing contexts. The findings suggest that the students had very different revising strategies and very different perceptions of the role that revision played in the entire composing process.

Numerous L1 and L2 studies of English composition have suggested that revision plays a central role in writing (Lo 1993; Leffa 1995; Van 1997), as it is a way to help writers discover meaning which leads them to reformulate their texts (Zamel 1982; Lai 1986; Fitzgerald 1989; Lehr 1995) and to improve the content and structure of a piece of writing (Yoder 1993; Whalen and Menard 1995; Clachar 1999). As part of the recursive nature of writing, as opposed to a linear style, revision occurs at various points in the writing process (Bridwell 1980; Faigley and Witte 1981; Eklundh and Kollberg 1996) and from this perspective, the writer is involved in a constant mode of revision including repair, rereading, rescanning, and reworking the entire text throughout the composing process (Raimes 1985; New 1999).

## Review of the literature

Recognizing the significance of revision in composing processes, writing researchers and instructors have given increased attention to the element of

revision. A number of studies has compared and contrasted the revising processes at different competence levels, and has revealed that skilled writers are more likely to make revisions affecting the global aspects of their writing while unskilled writers tend to make changes which affect the surface grammatical structure of composition (Bridwell 1980; Sommers 1980; Faigley and Witte 1981; Zamel 1982, 1983).

Explanations of these findings, however, have been insufficiently provided in previous revision studies. As Faigley and Witte (1981) point out, many revision studies fail to explore the important question of what caused writers to revise. As yet, one attempt was made by Nystrand (1989, 1990) from a social-interactionist perspective, in which the focus is placed on the relationship between writer and reader. Nystrand explained that a "misconstraint" results when there is a mismatch between the writer's message and the reader's comprehension, and the incongruities between them play an important role in causing writers to revise (Nystrand 1990). Fitzgerald (1992) further explained that, from a social-interactionist point of view, the goal of writers is to achieve reciprocity, or a stage of convergence with readers. Thus, from this perspective, a cause of revision is seen to be the discrepancy between the intended and the understood meaning (Berg 1999), and the lack of skills in detecting incongruities and finding appropriate text alternatives in part prevents unskilled writers from attempting revisions of their text (Sommers 1980).

On the other hand, Leffa (1995) and Porte (1996) made a distinction between not revising and being unable to revise, saying that it is possible that the same students who do not revise their text would know how to do it if they were in a situation in which revising would somehow be unavoidable. The conclusion is that although students do not spontaneously revise their own writing, they know how to do it in terms of strategies (Leffa 1995). Similarly, Porte (1996) suggested that students' revision strategies may be affected by past learning experiences and perceived opinions about the writing contexts, rather than by their incapability of revising.

This review of the literature suggests that the process of how students revise their own text remains unexplored. Specifically, we have little information about how students perceive the act of revision in natural academic writing contexts. Given that the number of students who move from an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to an English as a Second Language (ESL) context to pursue higher levels of education has risen steadily and they face a whole new set of expectations and demands in academic writing, the insight into students' perceptions of their own revision acts in naturally occurring situations should provide meaningful qualitative data for ESL writing instructors as well as regular course instructors. The present study, therefore, aimed not to simply make sense of what students are doing when they revise but, more importantly, to make sense of how students are making sense of what they are doing. As a secondary purpose, this study also aimed to identify the problems that students with limited writing experience encountered whilst they engaged in their academic writing tasks. The research questions for this study were thus formulated as follows:

- (1) What types of revisions are made by Japanese ESL students in natural academic writing contexts?
- (2) How do the Japanese ESL students interpret and perceive what they are doing during the act of revision?
- (3) What sorts of academic writing problems do the Japanese ESL students confront?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

In this study, three Japanese postgraduate students enrolled in TESOL classes in the Faculty of Education at an Australian university in September 2002 were investigated. As the secondary purpose of this study was to identify the problems these Japanese ESL students encountered whilst completing academic writing tasks, students residing in Australia for less than one year and with only limited academic writing experience in English were selected. Table 1 provides background information about these students, for whom pseudonyms are employed.

The first student to be discussed in this article, Kana, completed her undergraduate study at a Japanese university in 1998. Her major was European culture and history, and she also took an EFL teacher-training course. Although she was enrolled in many English-related subjects, she had no opportunities to undertake English academic writing, as she used Japanese for all her written assignments, such as reports and her graduation thesis. However, the graduation thesis writing was an important experience for Kana, as it provided her with the opportunity to recognize the differences between academic writing and the writing that she had undertaken in another contexts. After finishing her undergraduate study, Kana started teaching at a secondary school as an English teacher. According to her retrospection, Kana developed successful writing strategies (in Japanese) through this teaching experience. The original supplementary materials she made for her students revealed that she was able to get her message across to her students in an appropriate manner by means of writing rather than using spoken language. Kana also recognized that written materials were effective in order to make her delivery of her messages persuasive and convincing for her students. Kana recognized through these experiences that writing was an effective tool in helping her to convey proper messages to others, and that her own writing strategies were primarily moulded by these writing experiences. Two years later, she decided to study abroad in order to improve her teaching skills, and began to prepare for the IELTS test to enter an Australian university. Her initial IELTS score was below the required level, and this was mostly due to her low writing competence. As applicants have the opportunity to resit the test three months later, she spent the next three months practising essay writing, with the help of practice test materials and a native-speaker's feedback. This self-initiated intensive training led to her success in achieving the

required score. Subsequently, she came to Australia and enrolled in a postgraduate TESOL course without attending any university preparatory course in Australia.

Maki, the second student, completed her undergraduate study in Japan in 1995. She majored in international economics in the Faculty of Commercial Science, and she also took an EFL teacher-training course. With respect to English writing, while she has had limited experience in business translation, she claims never to have been exposed to academic writing tasks such as those at an Australian university. The assigned written tasks in her undergraduate degree were mostly reports in Japanese, where she was required to examine a set topic and simply describe and explain it. After graduating from university, she started to teach English at a secondary school. Since her primary interest had been translation, Maki incorporated translation activity into her English class, and she thought that skills in translation would lead to the improvement of students' overall English proficiency. Through six-years of English teaching experience, she became interested in improving her own English proficiency, and decided to study in Australia. After arriving in Australia, she started to prepare for the IELTS test by attending a three-month intensive ESL course. Maki reported that the most difficult task in the IELTS test was writing short essays. She had thought of herself as being a good writer before coming to Australia. However, this evaluation changed after she started to attend the Australian course. Her consistent efforts on the IELTS test, specifically to do with writing, led her to achieve the required score three months later, and she was subsequently accepted into the postgraduate TESOL course.

Yuka, the third student, graduated from a Japanese university in 1996. Her major was English literature, and she reported that all the written assignments for English literature were completed in Japanese. After finishing her undergraduate study, she worked for several years at a private company and also taught Japanese to business trainees. As a result of her Japanese teaching experience, Yuka became interested in obtaining a JFL (Japanese as a Foreign Language) teacher qualification, and decided to study for the Diploma of Education at an Australian university. She came to Australia in 2001 and attended an ESL school to improve her general English proficiency as well as her IELTS score to enter the university. Yuka struggled with writing short essays in English as she had had no previous experience in English academic writing. She was not even aware of the basic English essay structure comprising an introduction, main body and conclusion. In addition, her knowledge of vocabulary and grammar was scant at the time as many years had passed since she finished her undergraduate study, and she felt that she had forgotten many things about English. However, all the instructions focusing on novice writers at the ESL school were helpful for Yuka, and she claims to have built up the foundation necessary for writing short academic essays. After three-months of intensive training, Yuka achieved an IELTS score high enough to be accepted into the university. Yuka subsequently struggled with making adjustment to the new academic discourse community, often requiring her to improve academic writing skills and to fulfill different genre expectations. She was confused by

a new set of academic writing conventions in Australian universities, and as a result, she failed in passing the course requirements. At the time of this study, Yuka had transferred to a different university, and finished the first semester there. This is a university in which she was enrolled when this study was conducted. During this first semester Yuka had undertaken four writing tasks: a literature review, a critical review, a proposal and a project.

**Table 1**  
**Background information about participants**

Name	Kana	Maki	Yuka
Age	26	29	28
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Years in Australia	3 months	3 months	9 months
IELTS score (writing)	6.5	6.5	6.5
Graduation thesis	European culture and history (in Japanese)	International economics (in Japanese)	English literature (in Japanese)

## Materials

As the aim of this study was to shed light on naturally occurring situations where students undertake academic writing tasks, the written assignments for the subjects in which they were enrolled were utilized as materials for investigation. Table 2 below lists the students' written assignments submitted to the researcher.

**Table 2**  
**Participants' written assignments**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Kana</b>	<b>Maki</b>	<b>Yuka</b>
<b>Subject</b>	Language, Society and Cultural Difference	Language, Society and Cultural Difference	Curriculum and Assessment in Foreign and Second Language
<b>Assignment</b>	(1) Theoretical analysis (1200) (2) Research paper (3000)	(1) Theoretical analysis (1200) (2) Research paper (3000)	(1) Written evaluation of a curriculum model for foreign/ second language courses (2000) (2) Development and justification of a curriculum evaluation/model for a specific course (2500)

## **Procedures**

A triangulation of data collection procedures was employed in this study, consisting of diary entries, the collection of students' various drafts, and semi-structured interviews. Diaries are important retrospective tools in language research as diarists reflect upon aspects of their own learning which helps researchers understand the processes underlying L2 learning and acquisition (Nunan 1992: 118). In this study, the students were requested to record details of essay-related activities every time they engaged in a task, as well as their thoughts and evaluations regarding each activity. In order to explore any possible differences between various drafts, each one that the students produced up until their completion of the final version were collected. The students were requested to record the changes they made to a

floppy disk, and to save each draft under a new file name every time they make any amendments. To supplement the data elicited from the study of diary entries and the analysis of the drafts, semi-structured interviews were also conducted. The students were interviewed about their revising processes and what they had been thinking during the act of revision. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The data was gathered in Japanese, the native language which is shared by the students and the researcher. In qualitative research associated with L2 learners, it is often not easy to attempt to describe learners' actual language processing because the researcher and participants usually speak different languages (Takagaki 1999). It is hoped, therefore, that the researcher can obtain more accurate and more in-depth data in this study by the advantage of using the same language as the participants. Quotations from the data have been translated into English.

### **Analysis of students' revising processes**

As mentioned above, the students were asked in the interviews to recall what they had been thinking during the act of revision. Their responses or recall protocols were transcribed and categorized according to what aspect they had been attending to during each revision act. Their revision thinking processes were analyzed on the basis of Wiemelt's (1994) model: revising at the two levels of message structure and linguistic structure in interactional contexts of writing. According to Wiemelt (1994), message structure indicates what kind of message writers are trying to convey to readers in creating the mutual understanding of the same text, while linguistic structure means how language features that writers create function to account for the interactional contexts. The types of revision the students made were analyzed based on Faigley and Witte's (1981) categories: (1) addition, (2) deletion, (3) substitution, (4) permutation, (5) distribution, and (6) consolidation.

### **Results of the study**

Results of the study are presented in the following order: (1) students' perceptions of their behaviour during the revising process; (2) students' revising processes; and (3) problems students encountered in the writing process.

#### **Students' perceptions of their behaviour during the revising processes**

Analysis of the interviews with the students and their diary entries indicated that they had very different perceptions of their own revising activities and concerns about their writing as a whole.

## Kana

In relation to what she was thinking about during the act of revision, Kana stated:

As I revise my drafts, I'm always conscious of potential readers of my essay. So I always consider what kind of information would be appropriate or necessary for the readers. I think in my mind "the readers must know this, so I'll add it," or "I'll insert this information because this will make that clearer to the reader".

After completing a rough draft of one section of her essay, Kana read over her paper. When she did so, she always tried to see what she had already written from a reader's point of view, and revised so that the reader could have a clear understanding of her intended meanings. With regard to revising from a reader's point of view, Kana explained that this also means re-reading with a fresh perspective; in other words, she should pretend to be a different person reading her text for the first time:

When I revise the draft, I always try to eliminate my previous knowledge. In other words, I try to reread what I wrote with new eyes. I think I have to be a different person when revising; otherwise, I tend to stick to previous knowledge and cannot develop my ideas. I do not write for myself, but for others who want to read my essay.

As the above statement indicates, Kana generated new ideas as she revised. This was caused by her strong reader-awareness and indicated that she revised not only for keeping readers informed but also for entertaining them by elaborating ideas. Kana added that a substantial amount of time left between text generation and revising is effective in order to read back her text with new eyes and generate new ideas.

After completing the rough draft of the whole text, Kana oriented herself more to the discourse features of her text, indicating the close relationship between the content of a paper and its organization:

Toward the end of the revising stage, I attend to the whole text structure. I pay attention to the cohesions of each paragraph to see if they are logically linked. When revising the paragraph cohesions, I often find the paragraph 3 should be moved to before the paragraph 1, and then I happen to find paragraph 2 and 4 also makes a good connection. This kind of global level movement takes place at the last stage of my revising.

Analysis of Kana's final stage drafts revealed that she attended to the global aspects of the whole text structure and a variety of movements took place in her texts. As Eklundh and Kollberg (1996) point out, this kind of paragraph movement is made possible by the use of computers. Kana mentioned as follows:

This kind of large chunk movements frequently happens in my drafts of the final stage. I think this movement is made possible by the properties of computer technology. If using pen and paper, it might be hard to make such global revisions.

## **Maki**

Maki is a writer who claims not to plan before she writes or while she is writing. She stated that she would write ideas down as they came out of her head. During the writing process, Maki was concerned primarily with progressing from one sentence to the next so that the overall flow of her ideas made sense:

Usually I do not plan before I write or while I am writing. I just write down my ideas as I hit upon them. During the writing processes, it is very important for me to address the ideas I want to communicate at first without paying attention to linguistic aspects. If I pause to think about language use, I will forget the ideas I had generated and I will lose the stream of my thoughts. So, at the stage of revising, I attend to linguistic aspects of what I already wrote.

Her writing strategy at the initial stage was to write everything that came to mind without much planning or decision-making. As a result, she rarely paused during writing because she would have difficulty generating the next sentence if she stopped. This writing strategy caused her to focus on the local and the surface aspects of her text at the stage of revising:

When I revise the draft, I try to search for more academic and more sophisticated expressions. I always consider “if a native English writer writes this, how does he or she say it?”

Analysis of Maki’s drafts indicated that she substituted a similar word over and over again, and struggled with searching for much better and much more sophisticated expressions. As Bridwell (1980) claimed in her study of students writers, “I know what I want to say, but I don’t know how to say it,” was apparent in Maki’s revising processes

## **Yuka**

Yuka’s responses to the question about her revising processes indicated her concern about achieving the goal of the specific assignment task. She tried to follow directions carefully in order to pass course requirements:

When I revise the draft, I try to see if it follows a set topic and direction in an appropriate way. I know my essay often tends to deviate from the

direction and state a non-relevant topic. I failed before because of the deviation from a given topic. Since then, my focus during the revision has been to follow the directions carefully.

Students write in response to a set task which is a part of their course assessment, and they also write to the teachers (the discipline specialist readers) who they consider to have a vastly greater amount of background knowledge than themselves (Kaldor and Rochecouste 2002). Thus, student writing is, in many ways, an unnatural communicative process, and one that often represents knowledge display rather than knowledge transmission (Swales and Feak 1994: 8). As these authors point out, Yuka's primary concern in academic writing tasks was how to display her knowledge to the teacher or the expert in the field:

During the revision, I am concerned primarily with the teacher's expectations. I try to reread what I wrote from a teacher's point of view, and I try to display what sufficient knowledge I have about a given topic.

### **Students' revising processes**

As a result of the analysis of the students' various drafts, differences emerged among the three students with regard to the attention each paid to aspects of the revising processes. Kana frequently focused on a close relationship between the content of the paper and its organization, demonstrating audience awareness. Maki was a good example of a writer who attended to language issues in her writing more than to any other aspect. Yuka's revision acts illustrated a great deal about her focus on following the directions of the assigned tasks and fulfilling the teacher's expectations.

#### **Kana**

Kana was always conscious of potential readers when she revised, as noted above. She revised her text in consideration of the needs, abilities and purposes of her readers. Kana was also concerned with the organization and structure of her essay. Therefore, more focus was placed on message structure rather than on linguistic structure throughout her revising processes.

The pattern of revision strategies that Kana employed between her various drafts was different from the patterns of revision used in the other students' drafts. A wide variety of revision occurred in her working drafts. For example, she embedded a new paragraph in order to include information that would be appropriate for the audience, and she added a single word or phrases so that the audience could have a clear understanding of the sentence. Near the end of the draft, paragraph or sentence level movements took place so that better cohesion of the whole text could be established.

Another characteristics of Kana's revision can be labeled as a "revision episode," in reference to those revisions that occurred in a chain reaction—one revision cueing another revision and so forth until the end of the episode (Monahan 1984: 291). As Kana began her final draft, the episodic nature of her revision strategy became even more pronounced. She decided to add new information in one part, and this change cued three other related revisions elsewhere. The chain reaction of revision used in Kana's drafts was in contrast to the isolated mechanical revision used in Maki's draft.

The wide variety of revision types and the revision episode were important characteristics of Kana's writing process. Through re-reading, rescanning and revising repeatedly, a new idea came to her mind and she could develop her initial ideas. This operation also contributed to the improvement of the entire text organization and structure, as well as the rhetorical and logical cohesiveness between sentences, clauses or phrases.

## **Maki**

Maki attended to language use in her revising much more than message structure. She struggled with searching for native-like, sophisticated expressions, and she was most likely to make revisions at the surface or word level. Therefore, with regard to the type of revision she used, substitution predominated in her various drafts.

Maki stated that there were numerous occasions when she rushed to get down her fresh ideas on paper without a proper plan. Such behaviour may have obliged her to concentrate only on the surface features during her revision acts. Accordingly, her attention to language issues may have obstructed the more productive process of generating and developing ideas through multiple drafts.

## **Yuka**

Yuka attended to the overall goals of her essay in consideration of the teacher's expectations. She had learned at her Australian university that the requirements of written assignments vary according to different genres, therefore, to keep the goals and the teacher's expectations in her mind was a crucial factor for her success at academic writing tasks. In addition, the effective way of "knowledge display" to the teacher was also her primary concern.

Throughout her revising processes, Yuka attended to the above-mentioned aspects. As a result, addition and substitution methods were employed in order to follow the assignment directions and to display her knowledge of the topic. These were the revision operations she used most often. Yuka was less likely to concentrate on language issues than Maki, but global level processing did not happen so frequently in her text as seen in Kana's text. The type of revision varied in Yuka's drafts more than in Maki's, however, her revision operation was carried out for a specific purpose,

and thus her idea generation and topic development looked somewhat restricted.

### **Problems in the academic writing process**

As noted above, the secondary purpose of this study is to investigate the problems that the students encountered in the academic writing contexts in which they participated. Specifically, the experience of Kana and Maki will be discussed as they are the students who have just arrived in Australia without any preparation for academic writing tasks, and the written assignments to be investigated in this study were actually their first assigned tasks undertaken in English in the overseas setting.

#### Understanding the writing task

When students choose their essay/assignment topic, they need to understand the various aspects of the task they are asked to complete, and it is important to notice the verbs of instruction, such as DISCUSS, CONSIDER, DESCRIBE, ANALYZE, CHARACTERISE, IDENTIFY, EVALUATE, and so on. However, Kana and Maki did not fully understand what Australian university teachers expected students to do by these verbs of instruction, as at their Japanese universities they were accustomed to informative prose, simply describing a given topic in their written assignments. They thus struggled to differentiate DISCUSS from CONSIDER. They did not know how they should respond to a given direction such as ANALYZE and EVALUATE, as they did not know how to analyze or evaluate, and were unaware of the nature of critical prose dependent on the writer's own views (Spack 1997). Kana and Maki came to realize that the differentiation of these verbs was crucial to fulfill an appropriate rhetorical function and a particular communicative purpose in their academic writing tasks.

#### Fulfilling written genre expectations

In addition to verbs of instruction, differences in written genre were also new to Kana and Maki in the Australian university context. At their Japanese universities, their academic writing experience had been largely limited to reports (apart from their graduation thesis) in which students were asked to describe a given topic without critically analyzing or evaluating. Therefore, they were confused by the range of different genres set in assignment tasks at the Australian institution. These genre included reflective journals, essays, literature reviews, critical reviews, theoretical analysis, research papers, and so on. Since Kana and Maki were unfamiliar with these differences in written genre, they struggled to identify what the teacher expected them to do and how they should write.

## Citation conventions

Referring to the words and ideas of other writers involve many rules and requires a subtle use of language. This was one of the most difficult tasks for Kana and Maki as they had never learnt how to incorporate other writers' opinions into their own texts and they had been allowed to simply copy the sentences from a reference without paying attention to detachment and objectivity in their previous writing experiences. Both of them commented that they were surprised to learn that plagiarism is a much more serious issue in students' academic writing in Australian universities than in Japan.

Kana had considerable problems in creating a balance between her own views and the views that she had come across in her reading. She commented:

I don't like just writing down other writer's views because by doing so, my essay will be lacking in originality and creativity. To display my own views and ideas is much more important for me in academic writing, so I always try to make my own opinions heard after citing another writer's voice. However, it is still difficult for me to keep the balance between the writer's and my own voice.

Maki's attention, on the other hand, was paid more to mastering linguistic aspects. At the intensive writing session for international students, Maki learned that there are a wide variety of verbs to draw on when talking about someone else's ideas or words, for example, neutral verbs of restatement, verbs of opinion, reporting opinions and verbs of uncertainty. The synonyms were also of interest to her as they could prevent her from using the same words repeatedly. Maki commented, "My choice of words will reveal my stance toward the author I am reporting on. It will show whether or not I consider the author's claims to be substantiated. So mastering these verbs is my primary goal."

## Taxonomies

Part of the content knowledge of different disciplines requires a knowledge of the underlying taxonomies unique to the discipline (Halliday 1989). Insufficient knowledge of taxonomies prevented both Kana and Maki from understanding articles they read and reporting on them in their writing. Kana and Maki realized how little they knew about relevant discipline-specific vocabulary after starting their study at the Australian university. For instance, they did not understand what the author meant by DISCOURSE, as they had never come across the term before coming to Australia. They frequently encountered the term CONTEXTS in journal articles, however, its meaning was not clear to them. Kana stated:

I had thought of myself as having high reading proficiency before coming to Australia. However, now I realize that my academic reading skill is problematic and that reading in general and academic reading is completely different. I always have difficulty understanding the whole text of academic journal articles. I have many vocabulary that I do not understand even though I consult a dictionary. I think reading skill is closely connected to writing skill. If I do not have content knowledge, I cannot write about it at all.

This statement of her seems to imply that getting used to discipline-specific vocabulary through a substantial amount of reading might be a crucial factor affecting ESL students' academic writing skills.

### Using L1 while writing

L2 writers sometimes switch to their native language during the writing process (Whalen and Menard 1995; Woodall 2002). Although both Kana and Maki believed that “thinking in L2 while writing in L2” would lead to the improvement of their L2 writing, both of them reported that language switching frequently occurred privately during their English writing, like what Vygotsky referred to as “private speech”; a mental operation used to control or regulate difficult mental processes (Lantolf and Appel 1994). Kana commented, “I feel ‘think in your second language’ is my ultimate goal of the L2 writing process. However, because of my limited English proficiency, I cannot help depending on Japanese for writing in English at the moment.” Likewise, Maki also stated, “At secondary schools as well as universities in Japan, writing in English usually means ‘translation.’ Students are given some one-sentence exercises in Japanese, and they are told to translate a predetermined Japanese sentence into English. Even as an English teacher, I conceived of writing in English as translation (*wabun eiyaku*). Therefore, I cannot write English without using Japanese.”

Their comments imply that both of them regard language-switching as a negative factor affecting text quality. Kana and Maki are a heavily dependent on the Japanese-English dictionary, as revealed by the analysis of their diary entries and interviews. This dictionary-dependent strategy notably made their writing take a translated appearance and resulted in their use of anomalous expressions and unconventional syntactical structures. Maki commented, “My English writing reflects a Japanese translation. I am not satisfied with the translated tone of my texts. I have many ideas to communicate and convey to readers, but I do not have the tools to search for the expressions to do that. I feel I have to acquire the skills of ‘how to say’ it rather than ‘what I say.’”

### Concluding discussion

This study has identified differences in the revising processes of the three students and their perceptions of their own writing behaviour, as well as problems they encountered in their academic writing. Kana attended primarily to the content and organization of her essays, and she revised for the purpose of adjusting what she had already written to the needs and abilities of the audience. Her strong awareness of the audience caused her to make a diverse range of revisions. These changes were often cued by other related changes, and this episodic nature of her revision strategy contributed to the improvement in the coherence of the whole text. On the contrary, Maki was concerned primarily with the generation of text and surface features. Her focus on linguistic aspects limited the type and frequency of revision she made, and prevented her from generating new ideas and developing the topic extensively. Yuka was a writer who focused on the overall goal of the assigned task and kept in mind her assumption about the teacher's expectations and the way of knowledge display. Her adherence to a specific revision aspect hindered her from seeing other elements in her writing, and thus topic development did not occur during her revising processes.

The three students appear to have undertaken very different revising strategies for the reasons which seem to be based on past experiences and perceived opinions about academic writing, rather than because they were at different English proficiency levels (Porte 1996). Kana, who was an audience-conscious writer and tended to make global level revisions, had had a substantial amount of general writing experience in Japanese before coming to Australia. Kana stated that she had many opportunities to write in Japanese when she worked as a teacher at secondary school. She often made her original handouts for her students as supplementary materials, and sometimes wrote a letter to her students in order to convey an educational message to them. While making these written materials and letters, Kana was always conscious of her students who read them, and revised repeatedly so that her students could understand her message easily and properly. Kana remarked, "Writing is an easier medium for me to get my message across to others than speaking. Writing affords me sufficient time to revise, so I can make myself understood without causing misunderstanding. During the act of making written materials for my students, I spent most of my time revising in consideration of the students' needs and abilities. Through this experience, I found revision plays a crucial role in creating material which includes my proper message." This statement seems to imply that her revising strategies in English academic writing were affected by her past teaching experience and revising skills in Japanese.

Maki, who was a language-use conscious writer and tended to make local or mechanical level revisions, had a very different past experience to Kana. Maki stated that she had very few opportunities to write in Japanese in both general and academic contexts. Although she wrote her undergraduate thesis in Japanese, her evaluation on her own experience indicated that her thesis writing was not included in her writing experience, as she just picked up important parts and sometimes copied the sentences from the relevant references. With regard to English writing that she

engaged in during her schooldays, her experience was limited to translation, but Japanese-English translation was the activity she liked very much and found beneficial in a practical context. Therefore, even as an English teacher at a secondary school, her interest was translation and she often incorporated translation into her classroom activities. It seems, from the observation of her past experience, that her interest in translation is one of the most influential factors which obliged her to attend primarily to linguistic aspects during the act of revising.

Yuka, who was a goal-conscious writer and tended to be concerned about the teacher's expectations throughout writing processes, also had a very different experience to Kana and Maki. Yuka had studied a Diploma in Education at another university for a couple of months before coming to Melbourne. She had a tough time completing a number of written assignments there as she had never learned how to write academic papers in English. Yuka commented, "The most difficult aspect in terms of English academic writing was understanding the teacher's expectations and the requirements of the assignments. In Australian universities, unlike in Japan, there are a wide variety of genres in students writing, and the teacher's expectations vary accordingly to these different genres. In addition, the terms of instruction such as ANALYZE or DESCRIBE are also related to the different requirements of assignments. Initially, I was totally at a loss as to how to conform to such conventions, and there were discrepancies between my interpretations and the teacher's expectations. As a result, I failed in passing the course requirements and I dropped out. Since then, when engaging in written assignments, I consider whether my perception of what an assignment called for was matched by my instructor's positive evaluation and by what constitutes Australian writing. Based on this retrospection made by Yuka, her revision strategies which were revealed in this study seem to be characterized by her experience in the new academic environment different to Japan.

The results of this study suggest that Japanese ESL students may employ very different writing strategies and may have very different perceptions of writing behaviors, and these differences may lead to different strengths and weaknesses which they bring to academic writing tasks. Taking account of the fact that the three students achieved the same IELTS score at the pre-entry stage, it seems that English proficiency is not a factor affecting their differences. Rather, based on the qualitative analysis of the students' perceived opinions about writing, their differences seem to be primarily initiated by their past learning experiences. These findings are important as they reveal that ESL students who may be placed in the same level of ESL instruction and who have similar overall language proficiency scores and writing sample scores, may not be at the same stage of development in their writing, as Boshier (1998) suggested. It can be said, therefore, that understanding students' individual strengths and weaknesses in conjunction with the diagnosis of their past learning experiences would be necessary in the ESL writing course.

This study also reveals that Japanese ESL students encountered many problems in academic writing contexts. This is because they have limited experience of extensive writing in general, but more importantly, they are not aware that they are unprepared for the rigorous demands of academic writing in Australian universities. Analysis of the interviews with the three students indicate that their primary concern in preparation for studying in Australia was placed on speaking and listening rather than on writing, and that they had never imagined how difficult and complex a task academic writing might be. We have to take this evidence seriously, as it is sometimes believed that Japanese students are poor at speaking and listening while good at reading and writing. However, as Takagaki (1999) pointed out, this stereotype is wrong and constitutes an improper myth. Surprisingly, little research has been done regarding these students and their writing processes that would help both ESL writing instructors and regular course instructors to think about effective and meaningful instructions for them. More process-oriented research which would help document the needs of these students will be necessary in ESL writing research.

Although this small-scale case study raises a number of issues that warrant further consideration both in ESL writing research and teaching, and the findings of this study are not extrapolated to larger populations of ESL writers, the results of this study have provided in-depth data about three individual Japanese ESL students' writing processes and both their perceptions and problems encountered. It is hoped that such research would contribute to the development of appropriate materials for ESL writing instruction and facilitate these students' chances for success in new academic environments, and thus for a more productive life which makes their study meaningful and worthwhile in their future.

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