

Methods of Studying L1 Transfer to L2 Writing

Some researchers proposed writers will transfer writing ability and strategies from their first language (L1) to second language (L2) and benefit from such transfers. However, some other researchers found negative effects of such transfers on learning L2 writing, and some even argue that little transfer exists. The discrepancies might originate from the different methodology applied to studying the effects of transfer, and so a review of the literature was conducted to identify the methods applied in the previous studies and compare the results. Accordingly, three common approaches were identified: thinking aloud, analysis of writing pieces, and questionnaire survey. There were some variations in applying the same approach. For example, among the studies using the thinking aloud approach, some studied the process of L2 writing alone, some studied both L1 and L2 writing from each participant on different topics, and some studied writing pieces in both L1 and L2 from each participant on the same topic. Eight studies found only positive effects of transfer, four found both positive and negative effects of transfer, and one of the studies found little transfer. In particular, in studies found both positive and negative effects of transfer, positive effects were observed in lower-level writers, and negative effects were observed in higher-level writers, indicating a "threshold" of the positive effects of L1 transfer on L2 writing. These features have implications on instructions of L2 writing: instructions on L2 writing to adult learners should adopt different strategies at different stages.