

An Investigation of Three Chinese Students' English Writing Strategies

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the writing processes of second language (L2) writers, specifically examining the writing strategies of three Chinese post-graduate students in an Australian higher education institution. The study was prompted by the paucity of second language writing strategies of Chinese students in an authentic context. Data collected from a semi-structured interview, questionnaire, retrospective post-writing discussion, and written drafts of papers were analysed. The findings indicate that the three participants employed rhetorical strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies in their writing practice. This study supports Silva's finding that L2 writing process is strategically, rhetorically, linguistically different from first language (L1) writing process (1993). Data demonstrated that metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies except rhetorical strategies (organisation of paragraphs) transferred across languages positively.

Introduction

There are a series of controversial issues in second language (L2) writing research (Casanave, 2004). For example, some researchers (for example, Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Hinkel, 2004; Lee, 2005; McCarthy, Guo & Cummins, 2005; Martínez, 2005; Silva, 1993; Thorson, 2000) assert that L1 (first language) writing processes are different from L2 writing processes, but others (for example, Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Matsumoto, 1995; Schoonen et al., 2003) emphasise the similarities of the two processes. Some researchers (for example, Kaplan, 1966; Norment, 1982; Scollon, 1999) argue that it is the cultural difference that results in L2 students' rhetorical organisation problems, while others (for example, Mohan & Lo, 1985; Hirose, 2003) negate this claim. It is acknowledged that culture influences L2

writing, but the genre of the writing task completed by L2 writers, cognitive development and interlanguage development should also be taken into account. Another contradictory issue is that, some researchers (for example, Arndt, 1987; Friedlander, 1990; Woodall, 2002) contend that L1 writing strategies can be transferred into L2 writing positively, others (for example, Wu, 1995) maintain negative transfer from L1 to L2 writing. A simple conclusion should not be made in this case because it is important to consider the different stages of the L2 writing processes. For instance, Chinese writers were found to use L1 in generating ideas and controlling the whole process positively, but they utilised L2 to generate sentences in English writing (Wang & Wen, 2002).

This study looks at three Chinese postgraduate students' English writing processes and attempts to provide some insights for the above-mentioned controversial issues. In this study, L2 writing strategies are defined as conscious decisions made by the writers to solve a writing problem. Writing strategies are classified into rhetorical strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies (Riazi, 1997; Wenden, 1991).

- Rhetorical strategies refer to the strategies that writers use to organise and to present their ideas in writing conventions acceptable to native speakers of that language.
- Metacognitive strategies are those that writers use to control the writing process consciously.
- Cognitive strategies refer to the strategies that writers use to implement the actual writing actions.
- Social/affective strategies refer to those that writers use to interact with others to clarify some questions and to regulate emotions, motivation, and attitudes in the writing.

Whether L1 writing processes are different from L2 writing processes has long been a controversial issue in L2 writing research (Casanave, 2004). This issue is important because the idea of using L1 theory in L2 writing may be inappropriate if the L1 writing processes are different from L2 writing processes. Otherwise, L1 writing theory may be a relevant model for L2 writing (Beare, 2000). Generally, there are two conflicting areas of thought with regard to this issue. Silva (1993) stresses that "L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing" (p. 669). In contrast, Friedlander (1990), Lay (1982) and Matsumoto (1995) maintain there are no differences between L1 and L2 writing processes.

There are numerous studies on L2 writing strategies, but few are carried out in an authentic context (Leki, 1995; Wong, 2005). This study focuses on three Chinese post-graduate students in public health at an Australian university. In order to further the understanding of the above-mentioned controversial issues in L2 writing research, the following questions were examined in relation to L2 writing strategies of the three Chinese postgraduate students in this study:

- Which writing strategies do three Chinese post-graduate students report using in writing academic papers in English?
- Do these students perceive Chinese writing processes as different from English writing processes?

- Do these students transfer Chinese writing strategies to English writing positively or negatively?

Methodology

Participants

All three volunteers (given the pseudonyms Ally, Susan and Roger) were studying at the Faculty of Health at an Australian university at the time of the study. The University Ethics Committee approved the research and participants received an information and consent package. All participants signed consent forms. Ally was a female Chinese visiting scholar funded by the World Health Organisation, but she was later enrolled as a graduate student majoring in public health. Susan was a female Chinese doctoral student in nursing. Roger was a male Chinese doctoral student in the field of public health starting early in 2004. The information concerning these participants is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Background Information of the Participants

Name	Age	Sex	Major	Degree prospect	Duration of stay at university when the investigation started
Ally	41	Female	Public health	MS	6 months
Susan	28	Female	Nursing	PhD	6 months
Roger	42	Male	Public health	PhD	8 months

The three students were invited to participate in the study for several reasons. Most importantly, they were experienced writers both in Chinese and English. Roger had acquired two Masters degrees in China and the United States, respectively. Ally, as an administrative assistant in the Ministry of Health in China, wrote many reports in Chinese. She had also studied and travelled to a variety of countries. Susan completed a Masters degree in a well-known university in China and received a score of 6.5 on the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test. Therefore, these three participants could be regarded as proficient writers both in Chinese and English. More importantly, they all seemed to have a deep understanding of English and Chinese culture and their experiences in English and Chinese writing might, therefore, be meaningful for other Chinese overseas students. These could be "exemplary" cases for L2 writers (Yin, 2003, p. 10).

Data Collection

Sources of data included preliminary questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, retrospective post-writing discussions, and document analysis. The 100 items in the questionnaire on a 5-point-Likert-scale (see [Appendix A](#)) were developed based on Victori's (1995) study which investigated Spanish students' writing strategies. These

questions have been tested by two Chinese students and reviewed by two of my supervisors for its validity and reliability. This questionnaire was not used as a survey but as a warm-up exercise for the formal semi-structured interview. The survey stimulated the participants to think about English and Chinese writing so that they could report more about their writing strategies and deepen their understanding of English writing strategies. The participants were proficient English users, but if they had some difficulty with any words, there was some explanation to ensure good understanding.

The semi-structured interview was conducted with the three participants in Chinese to make communication more effective. Each interview lasted over one hour. All the interviews were recorded, fully transcribed in Chinese and saved by computer. When each participant completed his or her writing task, a retrospective post-writing discussion followed that focused specifically on the proposal or paper the participant had just completed. During the period of data collection, the participants were asked to keep all drafts of their assignments and then review their composing processes and construct a description of how it worked during the retrospective post-writing discussion. Table 2 is a summary of data collected from the three participants.

Table 2. Summary of Data Collected from the Three Participants

	Ally	Susan	Roger
Preliminary questionnaire and followed interview	1 answer sheet to the questionnaire and 1 transcript for interview with 5,626 Chinese characters	1 answer sheet to the questionnaire and 1 transcript for interview with 22,677 Chinese characters	1 answer sheet to the questionnaire and 1 transcript for interview with 4,561 Chinese characters
Semi-structured interview	1 transcript with 9,718 Chinese characters	1 transcript with 14,295 Chinese characters	1 transcript with 15,977 Chinese characters
Retrospective post-writing discussion	1 transcript with 10,190 Chinese characters	1 transcript with 10,289 Chinese characters	1 transcript with 10,190 Chinese characters
Documents	1 outline, 4 drafts, 1 final assignment paper (2,430 words)	6 drafts, 1 final proposal (11,121 words)	2 drafts, 1 final paper (3,625 words)
Length of observation	5 weeks	16 weeks	40 weeks

Data Analysis

In keeping with qualitative research methods, analytic induction (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Leki, 1995) was used to analyse the transcribed interview data, preliminary questionnaire, participants' papers and their drafts. In this approach, the researcher returned repeatedly to transcripts or questionnaires to read and examine the data, searching for salient or recurring themes. Merriam (1988) acknowledged that

categorisation of qualitative data was an intuitive performance. In this study, previous experience and the conceptual framework informed the generation of patterns of meaning or themes. In the following section, the study results and discussion of the key issues will be organised together for each research question.

Research Question 1: What Writing Strategies Do the Three Chinese Post-graduate Students Report Using in Writing Academic Papers in English? Using a framework of four categories of writing strategies (macro-strategies), a total of twelve micro-strategies were identified (see Table 3).

Table 3 Writing Strategies Identified from the Data

Macro-strategies	Micro-strategies
Rhetorical strategies	Organising strategies
	Cohesive strategies
	Genre awareness
Metacognitive strategies	Planning strategies
	Evaluating and monitoring strategies
Cognitive strategies	Generating strategies
	Revising strategies
	Imitating strategies
Social/Affective strategies	Reducing anxiety
	Drawing on previous experience
	Keeping high motivation and confidence

Rhetorical Strategies: Organizing Strategies

The responses to the questionnaire showed that all three participants are aware of the importance of text organization ([Appendix B](#)). For example, they all agreed that a text should always have a clear, well-defined organization and a good introduction should anticipate the issues that would be dealt with in the essay (items 21 and 30). However, they disagreed with the components and the methods of textual organization. Ally agreed that any English text should include an introduction, development, and conclusion (item 20). In contrast, Susan chose to disagree with this point and Roger neither agreed nor disagreed. Furthermore, Susan strongly disagreed and Ally disagreed that writing a conclusion is not always necessary whereas Roger agreed with it (item 24). In other words, Susan and Ally believed it conventional to write a conclusion in an English essay while Roger found some English papers did not include a conclusion. Ally organized her paper according to the requirement of the assignment and Susan followed the rules of writing a research proposal that was suggested by the Australian university. Roger used published journal papers as a model for organization for his writing.

Rhetorical Strategies: Cohesive Strategies

The most important finding from the cohesion analysis of the participants' papers was that these students used more lexical cohesive devices than other devices like references and conjunctions. For example, in Roger's paper there were 2,378 words, among which he used 209 lexical cohesive devices, but only 37 references and 68 conjunctions. The coherence of Ally's paper was also realised through the repetition of some key words. The words "health care" appeared 44 times in her paper. In the questionnaire, all three participants emphasized the importance of connections in English writing (items 35 and 36). However, Susan did not think each paragraph should have a unifying main idea and information supporting it (item 25). She thought it possible to have more than one idea in a certain paragraph.

Rhetorical Strategies: Genre Awareness

Roger and Susan appeared to have a clearer understanding of different genres of writing. They realised that there is not much difference between an English and Chinese research paper. Both have similar structures of introduction-rationale-methodology-result-discussion-conclusion. Susan said that vague (含蓄 han xu) language should not be used in academic writing but could be used in literary writing--because the terms in academic writing needed to be defined accurately while 含蓄 han xu (vague) could be used to express some indefinite images in literary works. Roger distinguished argumentative writing from descriptive writing:

Different from argumentative writing, paper writing in my field is more descriptive. In IELTS test we are trained how to write argumentative essay. The writer needs to propose the topic first and then support it with some evidence. I seldom use the argumentation rather than the description in my paper writing. What I need to do is to describe the result, for instance, Figure 2 indicates . . . (Post-writing discussion with Roger, translated by the first author)

Ally, however, emphasised that in English writing she could not use the methods of "埋伏 mai fu" (placing the soldiers in ambush) or "形散而神不散 xing san shen bu san" (loose form but solid focus) to make the writing more vivid. She did not seem to realise the rhetorical means she mentioned are usually used in Chinese literary writing. Since there are different genres of writing in different languages, writers use different rhetorical means in their writing. Susan noticed that Chinese researchers usually mixed the introduction and the literature review and gave little attention to previous studies in their papers. Roger found English researchers habitually gave a detailed account of each step of an experiment, even the dosage of each medicine, in their academic writing. As a result, these participants could follow strictly the requirements of the genre of their writing just because they had become aware of these differences in Chinese writing and English writing. Susan committed to the checklist of the requirements for the research proposal. Roger used the format of a scientific journal paper and Ally completed her assignment according to the lecturer's criteria.

Metacognitive Strategies: Planning Strategies

The three participants paid much attention to planning in English writing and they thought that a good plan could facilitate writing. For example, Ally made a plan according to the requirements of the assignment. Susan said she put more stress on global planning for several paragraphs of her paper because she thought local planning for a sentence or a paragraph was meaningless as she often changed the sentences in her writing. Roger said different people had different preferences for planning and he preferred to plan his writing in his mind:

Roger: They are some topic sentences. I think everyone may do the planning before writing. Some write down the plan on the paper while others prefer to save their ideas in their mind. All people have to think before writing when they are given a topic by the teacher. It is impossible for them to write without thinking about the main ideas. As a matter of fact, thinking itself is planning.

The researcher: So these people do not write the plan on the paper?

Roger: *Right. Because there are only a few topics, it is unnecessary to write them on the paper. The process of thinking is the process of planning. It is impossible for someone to write immediately without any thinking. Some people plan in more detail while others do simple planning. However, every writer has to plan for his/her writing. I do not like to write down the plan, but I write with a plan in my mind. Different people have different preferences.* (Semi-structured interview with Roger, translated by the first author)

Metacognitive Strategies: Evaluating and Monitoring Strategies

The three participants reported these strategies in their data. Ally evaluated the resource materials that she planned to use in her assignment as well as her own writing holistically. She said she searched a lot of materials for writing the assignment and adapted relevant information in her writing. Roger suggested that it was more important to attend to the structure of writing than to the arrangement of sentences in the process of evaluation:

I sometimes spend several days in writing a section of a paper. Suppose I write the section of Materials and Methods, I usually write a draft as much as possible at the beginning. Then I may evaluate this section to find something wrong with the arrangement of sentences or paragraphs. Sometimes I adjust the order of sentences or paragraphs or the level of importance in the sentences of paragraphs. I think I generally consider the structure of writing first and then the sentences or expressions. (Semi-structured interview with Roger, translated by the first author)

Susan often evaluated her own writing to see whether she was on the right track; she paid more attention to the ideas and vocabulary than the grammar. Roger evaluated "what I write and adjust the sequence of paragraphs or sentences within one paragraph."

Cognitive strategies: Generating Ideas

The three participants reported a variety of means to generate ideas. They used brainstorming to note all ideas in their mind and then decided on what ideas needed to be developed. They also adopted thinking of associations and interacting with other people including supervisors and peers. However, the most frequently used strategy to generate ideas reported by these participants was reading widely. Ally reported that she was not so familiar with the topic that she was asked to write about; therefore, she had to read extensively to familiarise herself with the required field. Ally described her process of generating ideas by means of reading extensively as follows:

I started to skim the study guide, reading materials bought from bookshop and reference books recommended by the lecturer. In this way I formed the general conception of the unit. Then I read the unit guide several times and pondered the requirement of the assignment. From these readings some ideas occurred to my mind and I put the related notes into the outline in the mean time. (Semi-structured interview with Ally, translated by the first author)

Roger summarised the rhetorical conventions of English research papers from dozens of readings. Furthermore, he also learnt English idioms by extensive reading:

It is important to read extensively and learn how the native writers use the expressions. You should use what native writers usually use and it is unreasonable to translate Chinese expressions into English directly because many translations are not proper for English writing. Even though your readers can understand your meaning, they know they are not idiomatic and improper for English collocation. (Semi-structured interview with Roger, translated by the first author)

Susan also believed that reading extensively was very important. She noticed that a key difference between English and Chinese research writing was that English researchers tried to discuss previous studies as adequately as possible while Chinese researchers usually introduced other studies briefly in their literature review. Since she had noticed this difference, she placed considerable emphasis on extensive reading.

Cognitive strategies: Revising Strategies

All three participants paid a lot of attention to revision in their writing process.. Since they typed the content into the computer directly when they wrote, the revision process was continuous. Roger described his revising process well:

It is flexible for revising process. I may revise the section of results while writing the introduction of my paper. I seldom revise until I complete the writing. Conversely, I usually revise while writing. In the revising process I think content is the most important, then the structure and the last the wording. Since the structure of my paper is definite, I focus on revising paragraphs. I put paragraphs under the same topic. This takes me a lot of time. But the word processing can help me with the revision of spelling and grammatical mistakes. (Post-writing discussion with Roger, translated by the first author)

The assignment by Ally was finished based on six drafts that were different from one another. In particular, the body of each of her drafts had been substantially revised. In her first two drafts, she built up the needed information as much as possible. Then she condensed the content in the following drafts--that is, she reorganised the sentences she noted from the readings and connected the content in her own words. Susan's second stage proposal was derived from her book reports to her supervisors. She said in the semi-structured interview that it was very hard for her to organise the writing because she had all the needed materials in hand, but she was often puzzled about how to organise the ideas clearly. Thus, she tried different arrangements and revised again and again.

Cognitive Strategies: Imitating Strategies

This is a strategy that was reported by all three participants. They tried to seek appropriate models for their writing. Ally borrowed previous students' assignments to learn the organisation of assignment writing. Susan said the model of a research proposal provided by her supervisor was very helpful for her to write her own proposal. Roger found papers with viewpoints similar to his and studied the format of those papers. He found papers that had similar structures with an introduction, methods, results and discussion section and he imitated this format to frame his own paper writing.

Social/Affective Strategies: Reducing Anxiety

These three writers felt great pressure from their studies in Australia. Ally sometimes had to hand in three or four assignments simultaneously, and she worked late into the night in order to complete the assignments. She said she had no time to learn Australian culture and society, which she was interested in, because she had to concentrate on her studies. Susan needed to send her supervisors a work-in-progress report (on her literature review) every two weeks during my observation, and she said she could not sleep when she had to complete the work. Roger was required to publish at least three journal papers before his graduation, and he was worried that he appeared older than his real age. To overcome these anxieties, they managed to moderate their enthusiasm to do well with their studies. After a period of hard work, they usually gave themselves several days off. Susan made an effective timeline for herself and tried to complete the required writing ahead of the schedule. She also stopped writing and read other books when she could not concentrate on current writing. She talked about her difficulty and exchanged information with other peers to lessen the anxiety. Roger regarded his academic life as a long journey because he planned to join the international academic community after his graduation. He said he would spend his life improving his English writing proficiency. These goals were a way of dealing with the intensive pressure of academic writing.

Social/Affective Strategies: Drawing on Previous Experience

Since these three participants were adult writers, all of them had a rich experience in working and life. Both Roger and Susan had experienced scientific research training in China. They compared their Chinese writing experience with current English writing experience and tried to accommodate English rhetorical conventions in

English writing. The resources Susan used included her supervisors, language teachers, workshops, and various seminars and presentations. Ally is a good Chinese writer and she knew the importance of getting help as much as possible, so she sought help from her lecturers, classmates, the library and on-line resources. These social and educational experiences influenced the three Chinese students' current English writing.

Social/Affective Strategies: Keeping High Motivation and Confidence

All the participants in this study were highly motivated students. To acquire a degree from an overseas English university motivated them to improve their English. Further to this, their supervisors' encouragement facilitated their progress and motivation. Susan said she sometimes suffered so much anxiety from English writing and even had thought of giving up but her supervisors' positive feedback improved her confidence gradually. Since Roger and Susan expected to join the international academic community after graduation, they worked hard to send their papers to prestigious international journals for review or did presentations to their peers. In this way, they got feedback from the specialists in their field for the purpose of improving their writing. Ally aimed to succeed in completing her Masters studies because she wanted to return to China after graduation. She claimed that she did not need a high level of English writing in her work.

Discussion

The results of the data analysis demonstrate that these three participants employed a wide range of writing strategies, which could be categorized into rhetorical strategies, cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies. However, each student has a preference of writing strategies and uses them differently. Regarding grammar and content, for example, neither Roger nor Susan agreed that working on grammatical errors improved writing fluency. They suggested that studying grammar and vocabulary was the most effective way of improving one's writing, and that one should pay attention to grammar and vocabulary when developing the initial ideas. In contrast, Ally disagreed that the content should be more important than grammar in writing. It is evident that Ally paid more attention to grammar because she found she still had difficulties in grammar while writing in English, as she reported in the semi-structured interview. Her attitude was consistent with the studies suggesting that less proficient English writers pay more attention to mechanics rather than content in writing (Raimes, 1985; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Studies in L2 writing have found that good writers in general concern themselves with ideas first (Cumming, 1989; Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Zamel, 1983). This study reveals that the three participants' primary occupation was with planning not only the content but also the organisation of their papers before starting to write. They could make good use of the strategy of drafting an outline to guide their English writing. They could take advantage of metacognitive strategies, which are usually regarded as strategies mastered by adults (Victori, 1995). In other words, they have the capability to control the whole writing process as adult L2 writers.

An interesting point is that these participants preferred the strategy of extensive

reading. The possible explanation is that they were not familiar with the target field in English even though they have had some study in the same field in Chinese. They had to search for more information to help familiarise themselves with the target field and generate more ideas to satisfy the requirements of the target academic community. At the same time, they learnt idiomatic expressions from extensive reading in their research field. This finding concurs with the finding of Hinkle (2004), that second language writers were highly dependent on resources for more information on the one hand, and on the other hand, for language borrowings. They accumulated considerable content and then removed unnecessary material. This strategy can help novice writers write a long essay without too much retrieval from long-term memory. During the process of reading, L2 writers could paraphrase the appropriate sentences and use them in their assignments or papers.

Research Question 2: Do These Students Perceive Chinese Writing Processes as Different from English Writing Processes?

At a superficial level, there seems no difference between L1 and L2 writing processes, however Susan noted that in Chinese journals the introduction and the literature review, the results and the conclusion were usually mixed with each other. She explained the difference between English and Chinese writing in the following way:

I have perceived the difference between Chinese and English academic writing, but I do not know whether it occurs in writing structure or somewhere else. I find researchers in Australia pay more attention to literatures supporting the study. While researching in China, I may cite some data to argue the importance of the problem and make a simple list of previous studies. It is a very very simple list. However, it is completely different in Australia that I have to give out the extensive previous studies on my topic and elaborate each of their achievements and limitations. It seems to me that their studies proceed systematically from the very beginning. In addition, I am required to have a very strong theoretical framework for my study in Australia while this is usually ignored in China although this has improved a bit now. (Post-writing discussion with Susan, translated by the first author)

Similarly, Ally understood that Chinese writing was rhetorically different from English writing because "in English it is expected to tell your idea bluntly in the very beginning of the passage" while in Chinese "obliqueness is more accepted" (Interview with Ally, translated by the first author). Roger said that in Chinese writing he would not plan in detail while in English writing he had to be very careful in planning:

If I write in English, I need a frame, paragraph or topic sentence. If I write in Chinese, I needn't . . . just in my mind. I needn't to prepare so much. (Post-writing discussion with Roger, translated by the first author)

All three participants reported that in Chinese writing they did not think so much about words and expressions while in English writing vocabulary usually constrained their flow of thinking. They had to repeat some words in their writing because of a limited vocabulary.

Discussion

There is evidence to suggest that L1 and L2 writing are similar in their broad outlines, and that both L1 and L2 writers employ a recursive composing process, involving planning, writing, and revising, to develop their ideas and find the appropriate rhetorical and linguistic means to express them. Silva (1993) suggests that with closer examination of L1 and L2 writing there are salient and important differences.

L2 writing specialists need to look beyond L1 writing theories, to better describe the unique nature of L2 writing, to look into the potential sources (for example, cognitive, developmental, social, cultural, educational, linguistic) of this uniqueness, to develop theories that adequately explain the phenomenon of L2 writing (Silva & Leki, 2004).

Research Question 3: Do These Students Transfer Chinese Writing Strategies to English Writing Positively or Negatively?

Ally used Chinese to generate the outline of her assignment writing:

I read the requirements of the assignment many times. According to the requirements, I considered the outline of the writing in Chinese and then put them on the paper in English. With this outline I read the relevant materials. (Interview with Ally, translated by the first author)

Ally acknowledged that she had to think about the organisation of her paper and monitor the writing process in Chinese because she said she was weak in language foundation.

Susan reported her experience of using connectors in English writing and she found herself transferring her Chinese usage of connectors into English writing:

I feel confused with the function and usage of English connectors. I seem to follow Chinese conventions of the usage of connectors. Sometimes I sensed there should be a connector like "and" or "however", so I put it there. But I am wrong. I often make this kind of mistakes. (Interview with Susan, translated by the first author)

Susan could not use English cohesive devices well perhaps because she transferred her understanding of coherence in Chinese writing into English writing:

As a matter of fact, you could express yourself clearly without connectors. I think so. Especially from paragraph to paragraph it is an issue with connecting sentences as well as connectors. I think it unnecessary to provide connecting sentences or connectors if only you make it clear enough. I do not mean you never use those means. You may use one or two connections from one section to another section, but you do not need it in the most of places. (Interview with Susan, translated by the first author)

However, her understanding of connections encountered her supervisors' objection:

It seems to me most of the content in my writing are connected through meanings. Sometimes my supervisors remind me of strengthening the linkage between paragraphs. In particular, they said they could understand me but they felt short of some linkage from this section to that section. (Post-writing discussion with Susan, translated by the first author)

Susan was bewildered by her supervisors' comments. In fact, she had transferred her understanding of Chinese rhetorical strategies into English writing negatively.

Table 4 shows that most of the metacognitive, cognitive, communicative and social/affective strategies could be transferred positively across languages and the organising and cohesive strategies might be transferred negatively from the three participants' report and analysis of their writing.

Table 4. The Tended Positive and Negative Transfer of L2 Writing Strategies

Writing strategies	Positive transfer	Negative transfer	Examples
Organising strategies	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roger did not give the conclusion in his paper. Ally did not present how she would develop her viewpoints in the introduction. • The three participants usually put the subordinate clause before the main clause. • The three participants actively looked for writing models and familiarise themselves with the task genre.
Cohesive strategies		Yes	
Genre awareness			
Planning strategies	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All three participants have the outline for their writing. • They evaluated what they wrote both locally and globally and corrected the mistakes in the writing process.
Evaluating and monitoring strategies	Yes		
Generating strategies	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They use Chinese to generate the main ideas for their writing but generate sentences in English. • They reported revising penetrated through the
Revising strategies	Yes		
	Yes		

Imitating strategies			<p>whole writing process and both local revising and global revising were utilised.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Susan imitated the excellent model of second stage proposal in her faculty. Ally borrowed the previous students' assignment as the model.
Reducing anxiety	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They refreshed themselves from the hard work by giving themselves a day or two off or switching to some other attention. • Susan and Roger made use of their previous research experience. Ally drew her Chinese writing experience, but it sometimes distracted her thought. • Susan felt more motivated when her supervisors praised her and Ally kept herself motivated to learn more in her field.
Drawing on previous experience	Yes	Sometimes	
Keeping high motivation and confidence	Yes		

Discussion

In L2 writing research, there has long been the debate about whether L1 writing can be transferred into L2 writing (Casanave, 2004), but few studies have done an in-depth investigation into what and how L1 writing strategies transferred into L2 writing. This study separates L2 writing strategies into four categories: rhetorical strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies and a closer examination of these L2 writing strategies indicates that most of the metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies can be transferred from Chinese writing into English writing positively and rhetorical strategies are found to transfer partially negatively from the three participants' reports and the analysis of their papers.

Chinese writers depend more on the meaning of sentences for coherence of passages than on explicit conjunctions to connect sentences or paragraphs. Hence, Chinese writers are not used to using conjunctions in writing; additionally, the usage of conjunctions in Chinese is different from that in English. As Chinese is a paratactic language, Chinese writers use lexical devices more than conjunctions to make their writing coherent. A passage is connected through the internal semantic structures (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002).

It is useful to identify which writing strategies could be transferred positively or

negatively in L2 writing, because L2 teachers can encourage L2 writers to use those strategies for positive transfer and to avoid negative transfer of L1 writing strategies. Therefore, L2 writers should be encouraged to use planning, revising, imitating, generating, and the other positive transferable strategies and be warned not to transfer L1 organising and cohesive strategies into L2 writing negatively. It is also important for L2 writers to know about the difficulties that L1 novice researchers have experienced.

Conclusions and Implications

The findings from this study are summarised as follows:

1. Three adult student writers employed a broad range of writing strategies for success in the target academic community. A taxonomy of their common writing strategies was established, which provides some insights for future L2 writing researchers and practitioners.
2. There is evidence here to support in part Silva's (1993) conclusion that the L2 writing process is strategically, rhetorically and linguistically different from the L1 writing process. All three participants considered Chinese writing processes to be different from English writing processes. When they wrote in English, they said they adopted a totally different process. For example, they said they planned in their mind when they wrote in Chinese, while they had to write out the outline when they planned writing an English paper.
3. As the L2 writing process is different from the L1 writing process, not all writing strategies can be transferred across languages and cultures positively. Among the four categories of L2 writing strategies, data demonstrates that for the participants in this study, most of the metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies can be transferred across languages positively, at least from Chinese writing to English writing. The rhetorical strategies do not necessarily transfer positively in the context mentioned here. In particular, the three Chinese writers in this study were found to transfer organising and cohesive strategies negatively, and they had difficulties in utilising rhetorical strategies.

The findings from this investigation have many implications for the teaching of L2 writing. First of all, novice L2 writers must be taught L2 writing strategies explicitly, as these strategies can help them adapt to the target discourse community more quickly (Braine, 2002; Dong, 1998; Hirose & Sasaki, 2000). According to Hinkel (1994), L2 students who function at lower proficiency levels may need greater help with their second language skills in order to transfer their writing skills. As most of the metacognitive, cognitive, communicative and social/affective strategies can be transferred across languages and cultures positively, L2 writing teachers can assist L2 writers to identify those strategies they have acquired in their mother tongue and employ them in their English writing. To reduce L2 writers' anxiety, L2 writing teachers may also inform L2 writers that L1 writers have some similar challenges they face in writing practice when they are novice writers. At the same time, the functions of positively transferred strategies can be explicitly transmitted to L2 student writers. Moreover, cultural differences need to be explicitly taught in order to acculturate L2 writers to the target discourse community (Connor, 2002).

Next, as it is very difficult for L2 writers to master rhetorical strategies, these strategies should be regarded as the important points in the L2 writing classroom. In particular, a comparison of rhetorical conventions between two different languages may be helpful for teaching. Chinese students are weak in cohesive devices according to this investigation, so they need more practice in this respect. Also, the understanding of English rhetorical conventions should not be superficial. Thus, professional L2 writing teachers need to have a deeper understanding of L1 and L2 cultures and writing conventions (Canagarajah, 1999; Matsuda, 1998). As Powers (2001) notes in her own teaching experience:

If we assumed such writers were dependent writers who merely needed encouragement to take charge of their texts, and if we adopted our usual collaborative approach to bring about that recognition of ownership we were unlikely to achieve our accustomed results because we were applying an attitude solution to an information problem. If we assumed the worst—that the writers were lazy and were trying to get us to take over the writing—we might be travelling even further toward the wrong solution, based on the wrong evidence. We were, in fact, unlikely to provide useful help to ESL writers until we saw the questions they raised about basic form and usage not as evasions of responsibility but as the real questions of writers struggling with an unfamiliar culture, audience, and rhetoric. (p. 373)

Furthermore, this study identified the voice of L2 writers who had been hidden from view. The disadvantage they experience in writing leads to frustration and pressure, despite the fact that they are highly motivated and talented. If they are studying at a university in another country, they have to cope with cultural differences as well as a language barrier. Additionally, they need to adapt themselves to the new environment, which is different from the one with which they are familiar, and try as well to resonate with the culture that dominates the target academy. Therefore, L2 writing or content course teachers need to be more sensitive to the students' difficulties in their writing (Braine, 1999; Canagarajah, 1999).

The dominant English academic community needs to be open-minded to a plurality of communicative styles and ideas about knowledge and ways of writing about knowledge (Spack, 1996). Clyne (2005) even radically suggests that English L1 speakers will need to give up their rights of imposing conventions on L2 speakers. However, it is not easy to make immediate policy changes in the English academic community. Nevertheless, while designing the curriculum or the writing task, L2 teachers need to think over L2 students' needs and their background while designing the curriculum or the writing task, so that the task may be more motivating and substantial for L2 writers.

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Appendix A Preliminary Questionnaire

The purpose of this survey is to find out what YOU think about writing both in Chinese and in English. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the items on the questionnaire. So, please, answer and offer your reasons as frankly as you can based on what YOU really think, not on how you think you should answer. You can explain your choice in either English or Chinese. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not have any effect on your grade or on anyone's opinion of you.

In this questionnaire, you will find statements describing different aspects about writers and about the process of writing. Indicate how true each statement is for you by writing a number besides each statement according to the following scale:

- 1- I strongly disagree
- 2- I disagree
- 3- I neither agree nor disagree
- 4- I agree
- 5- I strongly agree

- ___ 1. Different cultures have different types of texts/writing styles.
- ___ 2. The standard of what is considered good writing is established by each culture.
- ___ 3. Writing well in Chinese is very important in our culture.
- ___ 4. The Chinese writing instruction I received at school has influenced my approach to English writing.
- ___ 5. My educational, social experience and my family and friends has influenced my English writing.
- ___ 6. Writing in English involves a different process from writing in Chinese.
- ___ 7. Writing in English is simply a matter of translating ideas from Chinese to English.
- ___ 8. I have never been taught any writing strategies (技巧) in Chinese writing.
- ___ 9. I often use Chinese writing strategies into my English writing.
- ___ 10. Writing in English is equally difficult for both native (母语) and non-native speakers.
- ___ 11. Writing in English is more difficult than writing in Chinese for an L2 writer.
- ___ 12. I like writing in Chinese and I am a good writer in Chinese.
- ___ 13. I feel comfortable writing in English.
- ___ 14. The grammar we were taught at school has helped us develop good writing.
- ___ 15. By working on our grammatical errors, we can improve our writing fluency.
- ___ 16. Studying grammar and vocabulary is the most effective way of improving one's writing.
- ___ 17. When developing the first ideas we should pay attention to grammar and vocabulary.
- ___ 18. As we write, we should concentrate both on the content and on the grammar.
- ___ 19. The content should be more important than the grammar in writing an argument.
- ___ 20. Any English text should include an introduction, development and conclusion.
- ___ 21. A good introduction should anticipate (指出) the issues that will be dealt in the essay.
- ___ 22. Starting an essay is one of the most difficult steps in writing.
- ___ 23. A good conclusion should summarize the main points.
- ___ 24. Writing a conclusion is not always necessary.
- ___ 25. Each paragraph should have a main idea and information supporting it.
- ___ 26. Each paragraph should have a unifying (同一) idea.

Appendix B: Responses to the Questionnaire Made by the Three Participants

No.	Ally	Susan	Roger
1	4	4	4
2	4	5	4
3	4	3	5
4	3	2	4
5	3	4	4
6	4	4	5
7	4	2	2
8	2	2	2
9	3	2	3
10	1	1	1
11	3	5	5
12	4	3	3
13	2	2	2
14	4	3	4
15	4	3	1
16	4	3	1
17	4	1	1
18	4	4	4
19	2	4	4
20	4	2	3
21	4	5	5
22	4	4	4
23	4	3	5
24	2	1	4
25	4	2	5
26	4	2	4
27	4	3	4
28	4	4	4
29	4	4	3
30	4	5	4
31	4	3	3
32	4	2	3
33	3	2	2
34	2	2	3
35	4	4	4
36	4	4	4
37	4	5	5
38	4	3	3
39	4	4	4
40	5	3	4
41	4	4	4
42	4	3	4
43	4	3	2
44	4	3	4
45	5	3	5
46	5	4	4
47	2	2	2
48	3	2	3
49	2	2	2
50	3	2	2
51	4	3	4
52	4	2	4
53	2	4	4
54	4	3	3
55	4	3	3
56	4	4	4