APPENDIX II

Name : _____ Major : _____

Your academic status : _____

Native language : _____

How long have you studied English ? _____

_____

INSTRUCTIONS :   (1) Each of the following sentences may or may not have more than one meaning.

              (2) Circle the item that you think may have more than one meaning.

1. They are visiting firemen.
2. Mary likes those entertaining guests.
3. Small boys and girls are afraid.
4. Linda was too far away to see.
5. Visiting relatives regularly can be a nuisance.
6. The sailors then learned that meat was tasty.
7. He is in charge of shipping clerks.
8. She told me to go without any hesitation.
9. Jane's murder shocked us.
10. One of the students was not represented.
11. They gave biscuits to her dog.
12. Edward left his sister to paint in San Francisco.
13. Small boys and small girls are afraid.
14. Mary likes entertaining guests.
15. The sailors then learned how good meat tasted.
16. John loves his wife and I love mine.
17. Linda was too far away to see me.

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18. Please stop hurrying people.

19. He is in charge of the shipping clerks.

20. They fed her dog biscuits.

21. All of the students were not represented.

22. She could not bear children after the accident.

23. They are visiting the firemen.

24. She told me to go and not to hesitate.

25. Elisa took John's coat off.

26. She could not bear the children after the accident.

27. Italians like opera as much as Americans.

28. Elisa took the coat off John.

29. Edward left his sister in San Francisco so that she could paint.

30. The shooting of the hunter was terrible.

31. My father drank vodka and orange juice together.

32. Italians like opera and Americans too.

33. Visiting relatives can be a nuisance.

34. Bob made the table that was in the kitchen.

35. Jane's act of murder shocked us.

36. Please stop hurrying the people.

37. John loves his wife and so do I.

38. The hunter was a terrible shooter.

39. Bob made the table in the kitchen.

40. My father drank vodka and orange juice.

ASSESSMENT OF ESL STUDENTS' WRITING PROFICIENCY

Cooper and Odell (1978) state that:

"What we have needed for decades and what we must have soon is a period of vigorous research on written discourse."

Stewart (1978) appropriately reminds us that:

"... the identification and assessment of desirable changes in students' writing are no mean chores and right now, this particular line of approach looks most promising."

I have been interested in English as a Second Language (ESL) writing for some time and this interest is especially generated by an awareness that proficiency in writing is a major academic task for learners of ESL pursuing college-level studies in our local institutions of learning and in English-speaking universities abroad.

I have been further motivated to examine ESL writing because, from my own reading of research reports and literature on language development, I have found that studies on writing proficiency have focused primarily on native English writers; few have focused on writers for whom English is a second or a foreign language.

This brief presentation, therefore, addresses the need for more research in the assessment of writing proficiency of advanced ESL students.

It is my assumption that as long as native speakers of English are the focus, it remains unclear as to how research on writing proficiency will provide teachers with a firmer understanding of the needs of ESL students with serious writing problems.

One of the serious criticisms levelled against our educational system today is that its graduates cannot spell, choose words with care, or write clear, coherent, effective sentences and paragraphs in the English Language. English language centres and English faculties in our colleges and universities respond by arguing that

they get students from high schools who are not properly prepared for college-level English, and that the instructor-student ratio prevents most teachers from providing the individualised instruction necessary to teach students to write well.

In recent years teachers and researchers have been concerned with elementary and intermediate second language learners. Advanced second language learners, particularly those who plan to attend universities locally and in English-speaking countries, have not received the same kind of attention once they reach standardized test scored requirements. These requirements are obtained by achieving the desired proficiency level in tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and university placement tests.

Many second language learners who have obtained the required level of proficiency to take college-level courses often need additional writing instruction and practice before they can meet the standards of traditional freshman composition courses. ESL teachers preparing these students have for sometime felt the need for a direct measure of their students' ability to produce syntactically mature prose.

Facilitating second language learners' mastery over written structures, to a degree approximating that of native speaker proficiency, is the major objective of most ESL teachers. To evaluate this facilitation, indirect measures like the TOEFL, the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, university placement and proficiency tests such as the English Language Placement Test (ELPT) at the National University of Malaysia, are generally used. These measures, at best, have concurrent validity.

In the assessment of writing proficiency, recognition of correct syntax is generally not synonymous with correct production of syntax. An instrument that could directly measure second language learners' ability to control the syntactic structures while attempting to produce mature writing, would be of more practical value to ESL teachers interested in facilitating the language development of their students.

THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON WRITING

The assessment of writing proficiency is a very important topic in the writing-research community today. For several decades now,

researchers in the area of writing have attempted to describe in objective, quantitative, and revealing terms what syntactic differences can be observed in the writing of school children and adults at varying stages in their language development.

Research in the writing of college ESL students, however, is still in the infant stage. There are articles which present research results of groups of students but little information is readily available regarding how advanced ESL students function as writers, how competent they are, or how they differ from or are similar to native speakers in their writing abilities.

In the 1960's although there was strong concern for research on writing and on written products, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer (1963:5) concluded that today's research in composition, taken as a whole, may be compared to chemical research as it emerged from the period of alchemy. Some terms are being defined usefully, a number of procedures are being refined, but the field as a whole is laced with dreams, prejudices, and makeshift operations. Braddock et. al. surveyed the then existing research on writing, outlined basic problems in conducting research in writing, and showed potential researchers in the writing-research community how to refine the "structure and technique" of their studies. They summarized the findings surveyed and identified exemplary comparison-group research studies. Their emphasis, however, was on studies that appeared to assume we already had a thorough understanding of writing, and the written products.

Unlike the researchers of the sixties, many researchers in the 1970's and 1980's such as Hunt (1970, 1977), Combs (1976), Odell (1977), Britton (1978), Hogan and Mishler (1979), Gaies (1980), and Sharma (1980) made no such assumption. Rather, these researchers of the 1970's and 1980's raised questions which invited us to test, to examine, and to modify our basic assumptions about writing proficiency and language development.

Early researchers into writing proficiency, such as Loban (1983), Hunt (1965, 1968), and O'Donnell, Griffin, and Norris (1967), concentrated their studies on subjects who were **native** speakers of English. Hunt (1965, 1968, 1970, 1977), the name most often associated with the assessment of writing proficiency, adopted the technique of dividing groups of words into what he identified as

"minimal terminable units" or T-units. Hunt (1970b: 198-199) identified these terminable units as:

"Any statement that has just one main clause, I have called a T-unit, short for 'terminable unit'. The name comes from the fact that it is grammatically allowable for any statement containing one main clause to be punctuated with terminable marks at both ends – a capital at one end and a period or a question mark at the other end. Any T-unit can be punctuated as one sentence. In that sense this unit is terminable. But people write sentences containing two or more main clauses, and those sentences contain two or more T-units, so a T-unit is not always the same as a sentence, though often it is" (Hunt, 1970b: 198-199).

Hunt measured writing proficiency of his subjects by using the following indices:

1. mean words per clause (W/C),

2. mean clauses per T-unit (C/T),

3. mean words per T-unit (W/T),

4. mean T-units per sentence (T/S) and

5. mean words per sentence (W/S)

From his studies Hunt discovered that mean words per T-unit (W/T) was the best measurement of writing proficiency.

Since the introduction of the T-unit measure by Hunt (1965) and O'Donnel, Griffin, and Norris (1967) a vast amount of research has used T-units as measures of writing ability. Almost all studies that have utilized the T-unit as an index of measuring writing proficiency have made use of **native** writers of English.

While the effectiveness of Hunt's measurement of writing proficiency has been further established in Hunt's later works (1977) and in the works of Stewart (1978) and others, there is reason to believe that the impact of language development, vis-a-vis the language proficiency of advanced ESL students has not been adequately examined. Therefore, inspite of claims being made for the T-unit as a reliable index of writing proficiency, and inspite of the apparent legitimacy of such claims, there remains the issue of

whether this particular index of writing proficiency can adequately measure writing proficiency and development of syntax among advanced ESL students, particularly those who are attending colleges and universities.

Briefly, although it is evident as shown in the studies which made use of native speakers of English, that clause length, and T-units increase with advancement in education, there is still a need to collect sufficient data to demonstrate that these indices also measure structural growth of advanced ESL students at varying stages in their language development.

ESL WRITING RESEARCH

With the recent growth of and interest in assessment of writing proficiency in English language teaching particularly in ESL, researchers like Larsen-Freeman and Strom (1977), Larsen-Freeman (1978), Gaies (1977, 1980), Kameen (1979), Flahive and Snow (1980), and Sharma (1979, 1980), have acknowledged the need for an index of language development by which an ESL learner's proficiency in the English Language could be gauged.

The T-unit and the error-free T-unit have found favour in ESL writing research in recent years. Both the T-unit and the error-free T-unit have come to be recognized by both first language and second language researchers as easily-compatible, objective measures of writing proficiency, and are far more valid than the traditional measures, such as length of composition and sentence length.

Larsen-Freeman and Strom (1977) state that the T-unit is a viable measurement on which to base an index of ESL development. In fact, Larsen Freeman (1978) has found that the average number of words per error-free T-unit discriminates very well between different levels of ESL proficiency.

Gaies (1980) has argued for the use of the T-unit in ESL writing research on two grounds:

a. the T-unit is a measurement of linguistic development that is external to any particular set of data; and

b. the T-unit allows for meaningful statistical comparison between first language and second language data.

Sharma (1979, 1980), working with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, has found that T-unit and the error-free T-unit are especially useful measures not only for measuring EFL students' writing abilities but the language development of ESL students as well.

Kameen (1979: 343) has argued that in order to "better prepare composition teachers to help their ESL students learn to write," it is essential to have "a more thorough understanding of the relationship between syntactic skill and ESL writing quality, an understanding based on a solid body of empirical data."

I would now like to focus very briefly on my own work on the assessment of writing proficiency of advanced ESL students which I completed recently at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA).

Figure 1 summarises my investigation entitled "The development of syntax in the writing of university ESL students."

Both groups of subjects performed a free-writing and a rewriting task. The "Education" group rewrote an "Education" passage developed by the investigator, while the "Aluminum" group rewrote Hunt's original Aluminum passage.

My study focussed on the following questions:

1. When university ESL students are instructed to rewrite a passage written in very short sentences, do they exhibit the same general characteristics as they exhibit in their free writing?

2. Do the more proficient university ESL students tend to produce a higher percentage of (a) longer clauses, (b) longer T-units, (c) error-free T-units, and (d) T-units which contain a greater number of clauses?

3. Which of the following seven indices of syntactic complexity is the best indicator of language development in the writing of university ESL students:

    a. mean words per clause (W/C)

    b. mean clauses per T-unit (C/T)

c. mean words per T-unit (W/T)

d. mean T-units per sentence (T/S)

e. mean words per sentence (W/S)

f. mean words per error-free T-unit (W/EFT), and

g. mean error-free T-units per sentence (EFT/S)?

4. Is there a significant correlation between any of the syntactic indices used in this study?

5. How do the results of this study compare with those obtained by Hunt (1970a) and Larsen-Freeman (1978)?

In part, my study applied similar procedures and asked analogous questions as those previous studies which have used native- speaking subjects (Hunt, 1970 and 1977; Stewart 1978). From the results obtained it was found that of the seven indices of syntactic complexity used in the study, mean error-free T-units per sentence (EFT/S) was the best indicator of writing proficiency of university ESL students. This index of syntactic complexity produced very high F ratios for both the rewriting and free-writing output and indicated a strong positive linear trend toward more error-free T-units per sentence as the subjects demonstrated higher proficiency in the English language. The second best index of writing proficiency was mean words per error-free T-unit (W/EFT). This index of writing proficiency also produced very high F ratios for both the rewriting and free-writing output. Mean words per T-unit (W/T) Hunt's "best index of syntactic maturity" (Hunt 1970a: 6), was found to be the third best index of writing proficiency in my study.
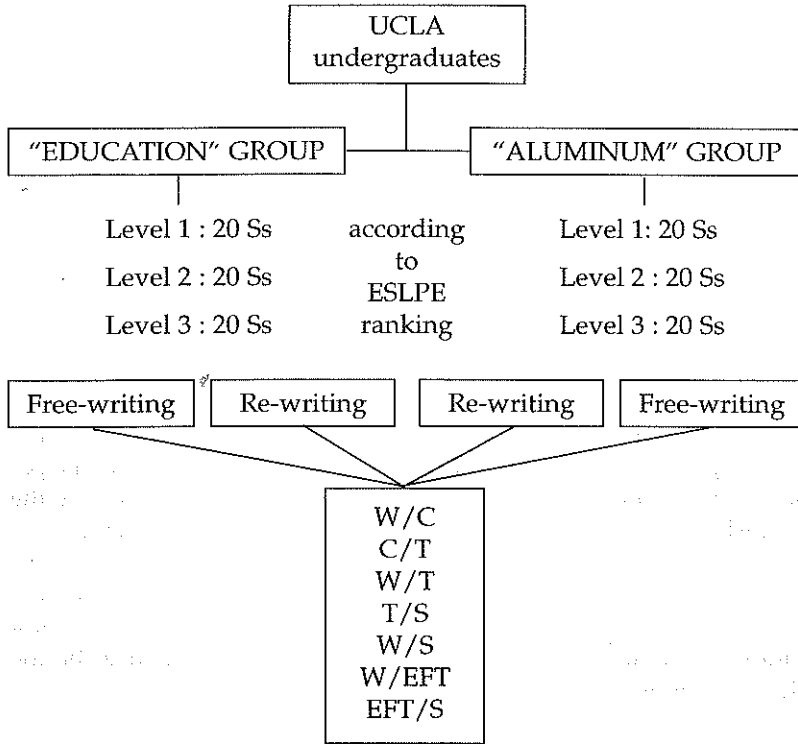
From the results of my research I have found that in the assessment of writing proficiency of ESL students, whatever measures utilized would have to be **error-free** if they are to discriminate well among compositions written by advanced-level students of English as a Second Language.

My investigation, however, has only forwarded tentative results since the analysis did not take into consideration variables such as sex, age and major subject area or length of time studying the English language. In addition, my subjects did not form a homogeneous group.

FIGURE 1

IN A NUTSHEEL

**The Development of Syntax in the Writing
of University ESL Students**

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    Level 2 : 20 Ss          ESLPE           Level 2 : 20 Ss
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One of the implications of my study has to do with the development of better methods for evaluating ESL writing, both through the use of holistic instruments and objective indices of measurement. The development of accurate and efficient evaluation methods is a primary goal in the administration, instruction, and research on the teaching of writing, particularly to students of English as a Second Language in Malaysia.

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RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON WRITING

It would be useful to have some normative data or at least some large scale research projects to unify the many current studies on writing. The availability of such normative data, usually expressed in terms of numbers, would help make writing research more valid, reliable, and significant as well as more representative of whatever a given investigator happens to be measuring.

Because so few studies to date have dealt with both the rewriting and free-writing data of second language learners, there are several possibilities for research in this area. Future researchers might focus on more detailed examinations of syntactic similarities and differences in free-writing and rewriting data for ESL students from the **same** language or linguistic background. These researchers might also examine the free-writing and rewriting abilities of high and low proficiency ESL students from a selected language background.

Additional research comparing the writing of advanced second language learners with the writing of proficient native speakers is also needed and further attempts to describe syntactic similarities as well as differences of these two groups may aid in identifying stages in the written interlanguages of second language learners.

The nature of syntactic maturity, mature writing, and reliable quantitative ways to measure its development must be re-examined and subjected to further investigation. Existing studies should ideally be replicated and refined and new approaches should be attempted in order to shed more light on the writing proficiency of writers for whom English is a second Language.

I would like to conclude with the hope that more studies in the area of writing will focus on students for whom English is a Second Language.

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SENTENCE BLANK FILLERS - A WRITING ACTIVITY

Language is never acquired or used in a vacuum. Rather, it is part of the way in which a language user explores and describes the world he lives in. Through communicative use of the language, a student of English as a Second Language (ESL) not only learns about English but also about the world. Well-planned writing assignments are one way a teacher can help ESL students learn to interact effectively, directly or indirectly, with others in the English language.

This article briefly illustrates one way of preparing a writing exercise that requires the student to make a considerable amount of effort in completing it. Exercises of this type met with success when tried out in ESL classrooms at the Language Centre, National University of Malaysia. The intellectual and often very creative contributions that the ESL students made have so far proved to be highly motivating and stimulating.

CONTROL AND FREEDOM

Basically, the exercise involves "filling in the blanks," not with words but with sentences of the student's choice. For the most part, students are required to provide linguistic material of their own rather than merely juggling what is provided. On the one hand, the students are controlled by fairly detailed instructions and the large amount of context provided. On the other hand, the student is unable to run through the written tasks automatically since he has to provide something original himself.

LEVELS

The exercises are not graded and in fact can be used by both intermediate and advanced level students. The only difference between the two levels will be the quality of the responses expected from the students. For less proficient ESL writers, of course, the exercises would have to be adapted, using more simplified language, shortening the paragraphs, and/or providing more contextual information.

Three examples of how this exercise can be prepared follows.

Example exercise one uses two short paragraphs. Generally, every other sentence has been replaced by a blank. Occasionally, however, this rule is violated to preserve particularly important sentences in the paragraph.

Example exercise two differs from the first one in that parenthetical vocabulary items follow some of the blanks. These are to be included in the sentences the students write.

The third example exercise illustrates the use of a longer passage with more contextual information provided by a greater number of sentences between blanks.

Example 1

FREE CHOICE SENTENCE BLANK FILLERS

Instructions:

In the paragraphs given below, each blank represents ONE SINGLE SENTENCE. Fill in the blanks with sentences of your own choice, ONE SENTENCE PER BLANK. The sentence you choose must fit the preceding and following sentences and the text as a whole.

Paragraph 1:

It was a typical gloomy Monday morning at school. _____ . We had to have the lights on in the classroom. _____ . Mrs. Bright, our English teacher, was two or three minutes late. _____ . Suddenly, Zainal said: " _____ " We all agreed to ask Mrs. Bright when she came in. We chose Anna Lee, the prettiest student, to make the suggestion to her. _____ . She looked pale and tired. _____ . She smiled and reflected a moment. _____ . She shook her head and said: " _____ ". We protested in vain. _____ . Finally, Mrs. Bright said: "If you really want to invite me out, you can do so after the class." _____ .

Paragraph 2:

When I opened the door, the delivery boy handed me a slip of paper and a package. _____ The package was square-shaped. _____ It sounded rather like an alarm clock. _____ This thought possibly frightened me more than I cared to admit. _____ The more I looked at it the more dangerous it seemed. _____ My heart was beating faster, I put my ears close to the package but still could not hear anything. The silence was awful. _____ As I ran, I could hear my heart pounding. _____ From this position I listened for the inevitable explosion. _____ I was still there when my father came home. When he came up to me, he was holding something in his hand. _____ He had opened the package to find it inside. _____ .

Example 2

FREE CHOICE SENTENCE BLANK FILLERS (with some vocabulary items given)

Instructions:

Each of the following blanks represents ONE SINGLE SENTENCE. Fill in the blanks with sentences of your own choice, ONE SENTENCE PER BLANK. The sentence you choose must fit the preceding and following sentences and the text as a whole. In some blanks, include the vocabulary items given in parentheses.

Two nights ago I had the fright of my life. _____ I spent most of the evening at Abraham's house watching a video program with his family. _____ (thriller) As a result I was fairly jittery by the time I was ready to leave Abraham's place. _____ (eventually) It was pitch dark. _____ (moon) The village street lights had all gone out at midnight. _____ (however) I have lived in this village for more than fifteen years. _____ I knew that I had parked my scooter by the second tree on the right of Abraham's house. _____ (groped for) When I came across the first tree I suddenly became aware of the old cemetary on my left. _____ (reminded) I almost felt as though I myself had become a participant in a horrow movie. _____ There was total silence everywhere. _____ (my footsteps, echo) I continued to grope around in the pitch darkness.

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Where was the scooter of mine? _____ (nervous) My imagination began to work overtime. _____ Most of the village folks had been in bed for ages. _____ I moaned in pain. _____ I picked it up and tried to start it at once. _____ I tried again. _____ I cursed it under my breath. _____ (the scooter's headlight) Instantly, I saw it in the spotlight. _____ He was near enough to touch me. _____ I backed the scooter away from him. _____ (the graveyard) I fled like a frightened bat out of hell on my machine, making so much noise I probably woke the whole village. _____ When I finally got home, I rushed to the kitchen to get a drink. _____ I told myself I was safe at home. _____ It was a long time before I got to bed. _____

Example 3

FREE CHOICE SENTENCE BLANK FILLERS

Instructions:

Each of the following blanks represents ONE SINGLE SENTENCE. Fill in the blanks with sentences of your own choice, ONE SENTENCE PER BLANK. The sentence you choose must fit the preceding and following sentences and the text as a whole.

Mr Lim was a very fat man in his forties. _____ Its name was Brownie. _____ Naturally, the dog and its master looked rather similar. _____ Every evening, on weekdays they only walked down to the end of the road and back. _____ So Brownie was always delighted when weekends came around. _____ One Sunday evening, Mr. Lim and Brownie were on their usual walk when a group of five teenagers ran up to them and started to shout. " _____ !" This certainly made both Mr. Lim and his dog very angry and embarrassed. _____ But unluckily for them, the teenagers outran them. _____ From that weekend onwards, the teenagers made a habit of teasing fat Mr. Lim and his dog.

However, Mr. Lim decided that he and Brownie had better pay more attention to their diet as well as increase their exercises. _____ The naughty teenagers, however, did not notice the change in their appearances. Two weeks later, on a Sunday evening, these teenagers ran out as usual and shouted their favourite insults

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at Mr. Lim and his dog. _____ They ran away laughing, thinking that Mr. Lim and Brownie would not catch them. _____ One of the teenagers suddenly felt Brownie's teeth fasten firmly onto his pants. _____ The other four teenagers stopped running and turned around in surprise. In the meantime, Mr. Lim ran up, calling out to his dog. _____ Finally, the five youngsters escaped. _____ Brownie stood watching them, a large piece of blue cloth in his mouth. He was wagging his tail in great delight. _____ From that day on, the five teenagers were never seen again when Mr. Lim and Brownie were on their walks down the street. The youngsters never tried their trick again.

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MEASURING WRITING PROFICIENCY OF COLLEGE ESL STUDENTS

Teachers preparing English as a Second Language (ESL) students for college-level work have for some time felt the need for a direct measure of their students' ability to produce syntactically mature prose. An instrument that could directly measure second language learners' ability to control syntactic structures while attempting to produce mature writing, would be of practical value to ESL teachers interested in facilitating the language development of their students.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the need for more research in the assessment of writing proficiency of college ESL students. Previous studies on syntactic maturity levels, and on differences in syntactic structures, have focused primarily on native English writers; few have focused on writers for whom English is a second language.

RESEARCH IN THE AREA OF WRITING

For several decades now researchers in the area of writing have tried to describe in objective, quantitative and revealing terms what syntactic differences can be observed in the writing of school children and adults at varying stages in their language development. Following the publication of Chomsky's Syntactic Structures (1957), considerable research has been carried out that examines various performance aspects of syntactic complexity.

Research in the writing of college ESL students, however, is still in the beginning stages. There are many articles which present research results of groups of students but little information is readily available regarding how college ESL students function as writers, how competent they are, or how they differ from or are similar to native speakers in their writing abilities.

In addition to the fact that research in ESL writing has not provided us with universally accepted theoretical or practical answers, there is the fact that current research in second language learning has developed in several directions.

In the last two decades, although there was strong concern for research on writing and on written products, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963:5) came to the conclusion that "today's research in composition, taken as a whole, may be compared to chemical research as it emerged from the period of alchemy: some terms are being defined usefully, a number of procedures are being refined, but the field as a whole is laced with dreams, prejudices, and makeshift operations." After surveying much of the then existing research on writing, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer outlined basic problems in conducting research in writing, and showed potential researchers how to refine the "structure and technique" of their studies.

Although Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963: 31–32) identified new questions which were likely to lead researchers into "unexplored territory," they indicated the need for "direct observation" and case study procedures in their suggestions for future studies. They raised pertinent questions, such as "What is involved in the act of writing?" and "What does skill in writing actually consist of?", which could lead to basic research in writing, but their emphasis was on studies that appeared to assume we already had a thorough understanding of writing and the written products.

Unlike those researchers cited by Braddock et al., many researchers in the 1970's and 1980's like Hunt (1970a, 1977), Odell, Cooper and Courts (1978), Faigley (1979), Sharma (1979, 1980), Flahive and Snow (1980), Gaies (1980), Ferris and Politzer (1981), McKay (1981), Buchanan (1982), Harris (1982), Jones (1982), and Zamel (1982), made no such assumption. Rather, these researchers raise questions which invite us to test, to examine, and to modify our basic assumptions about writing and syntactic complexity among college students.

RESEARCH IN FIRST LANGUAGE COMPOSITION

Early researchers into syntactic complexity, such as Loban (1963), Hunt (1964, 1965, 1966, 1968) and O'Donnell, Griffin, and Norris (1967), concentrated their studies mainly on children who were native speakers of English. Hunt (1964, 1965, 1966, 1968, 1970a, 1970b and 1977), the name most often associated with research in syntactic development, adopted the technique of

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In one of his early studies Hunt (1965) investigated the free writing of school children in grades 4, 8 and 12, and the writing of skilled adults who wrote for Harper's and Atlantic magazines. Each grade group consisted of a total of 18 students, nine male and nine female. The group of skilled adults who were native speakers of English was made up of nine from each magazine. In this study Hunt used the T-unit as his main measuring device to examine the syntactic development in the free writing of his subjects. The study by O'Donnell, Griffin, and Norris also used the T-unit as one of their measures in studying syntactic development in both the speech and free writing of kindergarten and elementary school children.

The findings by Hunt (1965) and O'Donnell, Griffin, and Norris (1967) reveal that there is evidence to indicate that throughout the school years, from kindergarten to graduation, English-speaking children learn to use a larger and larger number of sentence-combining transformations per main clause in their writing.

The studies by Hunt (1965) and O'Donnell, Griffin, and Norris (1967) have dealt with two different kinds of free writing. It is therefore possible to assume that the influence of subject matter upon the sentence structures produced by the subjects could be an important factor for consideration in determining the progressive increase in syntactic complexity. Generally, older writers tend to write on more sophisticated subjects or to deal with ordinary subjects in more sophisticated ways, and in studies like these, the subject and the treatment of the subject might have had as much to do with the sentence structures chosen as the age and syntactic capabilities of the writers.

Since the studies by Hunt (1965) and O'Donnell, Griffin, and Norris (1967), a vast amount of research on writing ability of native speakers of English has been carried out. Investigators such as Mellon (1969), O'Hare (1973), Combs (1976), Maimon and Nodine (1978), Mulder, et al. (1978), Daiker, et al. (1978), Morenberg, et al. (1978), Faigley (1979) and Haswell (1981), have used the T-unit as an index of syntactic maturity to demonstrate that sentence-combining exercises can accelerate significantly the syntactic growth of widely disparate age groups among native speakers of English.

Other studies on the assessment of writing proficiency of native speakers have been carried out by Hunt (1970a, 1977), Stewart (1978), Freedman (1980), King (1981), and Crowhurst (1980). Collectively, these studies have demonstrated that syntactic complexity (that is, the effective use of subordinate clauses) develops chronologically in the writing of English-speaking subjects.

Hunt's study (1970a) makes use of a rewrite passage with native speakers of English. He studies the rewriting abilities of groups of students, 50 in each group, at grades 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12, and then compares these with groups described as "average" and "skilled" adults. Hunt examines a number of factors and measures syntactic development in his subjects.

From an analysis of syntactic structures written by the subjects, Hunt finds that the level of syntactic complexity of all his subjects increases consistently as they mature and progress through the formal education system. "Average" adults are shown to be slightly above grade 12 while there is a sharp rise in the level of complexity shown by "skilled" adults over that of the grade 12 and "average" adults groups.

Using the same instrument and procedures employed in 1970 by Hunt to measure writing proficiency, Stewart reports on an experiment to determine whether growth in syntactic maturity continues to increase as a person leaves high school and proceeds through six years of study in a university. His native English-speaking subjects are drawn from 126 students from grades 10, 11 and 12 and 176 university students. Stewart finds Hunt's procedures and measures to be useful in measuring writing proficiency among his subjects.

From his experiment Stewart concludes that:

(a) students in the first three years of university do not display significant gains in syntactic maturity over levels reached in the last years of high school;

(b) students in the fifth and sixth years of university do display gains over high school and lower level university students; and

(c) mean words per T-unit appears to be the best of those measures of syntactic growth employed by Hunt.

Stewart (1978: 46) advocates replication of his study and further research in the area of writing proficiency of college students in order that the entire question of the nature of syntactic maturity and the measurement of its development "be re-examined and subjected to much more investigation." Stewart concludes that "the identification and assessment of desirable changes in students' writing are no mean chores, and right now, this particular line of approach looks most promising."

Although all the studies mentioned so far have implicitly or explicitly indicated growth in syntactic complexity in the writing of native speakers of English, there is reason to believe that the impact of syntactic development, vis-a-vis the writing proficiency of college ESL students has not been adequately examined.

RESEARCH IN ESL COMPOSITION

The history of this research is limited since only a very few studies to date have involved the measurement of writing proficiency of ESL or foreign language learners at all levels of education. It appears that research on writing in general and on ESL writing in particular, has yet to produce work that would ensure wide recognition for the value of process studies in composition. One possible limitation of work done to date is methodological.

Perl (1979: 317), describing the state of research on writing, indicates that narrative descriptions of the writing process "do not provide sufficiently graphic evidence for the perception of underlying regularities and patterns." Without such evidence, she contends, it is difficult to generate well-defined hypotheses and to move from exploratory research in writing to more controlled experimental studies. Perl points out that one limitation pertains to the subjects studied: to date not many examinations of the writing process have dealt primarily with subjects for whom English is a second language.

With the recent growth of an interest in the assessment of writing proficiency in ESL, researchers like Larsen-Freeman and Strom (1970), Larsen-Freeman (1978), Sharma (1979, 1980), Kameen (1979), Flahive and Snow (1980) and Gaies (1980), have acknowledged the need for an index of development by which an ESL learner's proficiency in the English language should be gauged.

Kameen (1979: 343) argues that in order to "better prepare composition teachers to help their ESL students learn to write," it is essential to have "a more thorough understanding of the relationship between syntactic skill and ESL writing quality, an understanding based on a solid body of empirical data." From the results of an exploratory study to determine if there was a correlation between syntactic skills and scores assigned to compositions written by college-level ESL students, Kameen (1979: 349) concluded that "in terms of length of writing units, T-unit length and clause length appear to be much more reliable indices of rated quality than is the time-honoured index of sentence length."

While Flahive and Snow (1980) concede that "there is far more writing than length of T-unit or clause per T-unit," they acknowledge that these measures are "relatively useful in determining levels of overall ESL proficiency and in predicting the overall effectiveness of writing ability."

Consequently, the T-unit as an index of measurement for writing proficiency, first used by Hunt (1970a, 1970b, 1977), has found favour in ESL research in recent years. The T-unit was first adopted in the form of error-free T-unit by Scott and Tucker (1974), who wanted an index of measurement which reflected error frequency as well as syntactic complexity in the writing of their experimental subjects. Both the T-unit and the error-free T-unit have come to be recognized by both first language and second language researchers as easily computable, objective measures of syntactic growth in writing proficiency, and are far more valid than the traditional measures, such as sentence length.

Larsen-Freeman and Strom (1977) state that the T-unit is a viable measure on which to base an index of ESL development. In fact, in her research, Larsen-Freeman (1978) has found that the average number of words per error-free T-unit discriminates very well between different levels of ESL proficiency. Her study, however, poses a problem with an uneven distribution of subjects among her groups, and there have been several overlapping standard deviations. Larsen-Freeman points out that her groups are not homogenous regarding proficiency, which means that any one individual may fit into more than one group based on any one of her indices of writing proficiency taken alone.

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Other studies on language development and on college-student writing that have utilized the T-units in an ESL context, have been carried out by Arthur (1979), Celce-Murcia and Santos (1979), Perkins (1980), and Ferris and Politzer (1981).

Arthur's study on the measurement of writing proficiency of English as a Second Language students at the University of Michigan indicates that assessment of writing proficiency does provide an objective look at some short-term changes that could occur in the writing skills of learners of ESL. Using nine measurements made on each of 152 compositions written by 14 lower-intermediate level ESL students, Arthur determines a number of changes in the writing skills of his students. From his analysis Arthur (1979: 342) concludes that "the most notable improvements were in writing speed and in vocabulary size." Although Arthur has used T-units in three of the nine measurements to measure grammatical sophistication, he reports that "there was no significant change" in the frequency of grammatical errors. Although an exploratory study, Arthur's work is an example of research that has used measures based on the T-units to measure language development of students based on samples of their writing.

Drawing on the work of Larsen-Freeman (1978) and Arthur (1979), Celce-Murcia and Santos (1979) have utilized T-units and error-free T-units to measure the writing proficiency of a native user of American Sign Language studying ESL over a period of one year. At the end of the year both researchers found that there was a "striking increase" in ESL language development, particularly in the number of words, the average length of T-units, and the average length of the error-free T-units. This study by Celce-Murcia and Santos appears to be the first to utilize T-units and error-free T-units in studying the developing features of the inter-language of a native user of American Sign Language studying English as a Second Language.

Perkins (1980) has utilized T-units and error-free T-units as two of ten objective measures of writing proficiency to evaluate compositions written by advanced level ESL students at the Centre of English as a Second Language, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Perkins (1980: 67) finds that "objective measures which take the absence of errors into account discriminate among holistic

qualitative judgments of compositions from one level of proficiency." His conclusion is that whatever measures are isolated will have to be error-free if they are to discriminate among compositions written by advanced-level students of English as a Second Language.

Ferris and Politzer (1981) adopt the T-unit evaluation of writing proficiency to measure differences in ESL writing skills of a group of Spanish-speaking junior high school students. The investigators use three indices of writing measurement for their research: (1) the average clause length, (2) the number of words per T-unit, and (3) the number of clauses per T-unit. Although their findings do not reveal significant results for clause length and average number of clauses per T-unit, Ferris and Politzer (1981: 267) contend that ESL students "who write large T-units are generally accepted as better writers by teachers and writing authorities because they possess greater flexibility in the kinds of sentences they can write."

In summarizing the trends in experimental procedures and analyses of the writing proficiency studies with college ESL learners, it is possible to see that, by and large, variables such as sex, age, major subject area, or length of time studying the English language, have not been controlled for nor have subjects been specifically described in terms of some standardized measures, such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, which could facilitate replication. In the major findings and conclusions of the studies on college ESL writers, no single index has proven satisfactory as the predictor of ESL writing proficiency.

CONCLUSION

In language learning the development of a learner's syntactic component is a continuous process. The syntactic component responds to demands made upon it rather as muscles respond when working with increasingly heavy weights. This process is as active with second language college students as with native speakers of English.

Many second language learners who have obtained the required proficiency to allow them to take college-level courses often need additional writing instruction and practice before they

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Proficiency in writing is a major academic requirement for learners of ESL preparing for college-level work, whether in overseas or local colleges. ESL teachers preparing such students have for some time felt the need for a direct measure of their students' ability to produce syntactically mature prose. Many existing language tests and measurements, because of their emphasis on objectivity and reliability, have encouraged the use of indirect measurement of writing skills.

Facilitating second language learners' control over written structures to a degree approximating that of native speakers is the major objective of most college ESL teachers. To evaluate this facilitation, indirect measures like the TOEFL, the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, university placement and proficiency tests such as the English as Second Language Placement Examination (ESLPE) at the University of California at Los Angeles are generally used. These measures have, at best, concurrent validity. Recognition of correct syntax is generally not synonymous with correct production of syntax. An instrument which could directly measure second language learners' ability to control syntactic structures while attempting to produce mature writing, would be of more practical value to college ESL teachers interested in facilitating the language development of their students.

At present, in most colleges where there are ESL classes, syntactic structures are taught at a variety of proficiency levels with some structures being taught at the "low" level, some at the "intermediate", and "advanced" levels except in qualitative and subjective terms. Some syntactic structures have to be taught first, and some last. If teachers of ESL knew what structures tended to be used at the different levels of proficiency, such knowledge might be one consideration, though not the only one, in helping them decide what should be taught when.

The main aim of this paper is to emphasize that as long as native speakers of English are the focus, it remains unclear as to how research on writing will provide teachers with a firmer understanding of the needs of college ESL students with serious

writing problems. Due to inadequate research or to the manner in which the data has been elicited or the insufficient amount of data in the samples, not much is known about the syntactic characteristics in the writing of college ESL students at varying stages in their English language development.

A more thorough understanding of these syntactic characteristics in the writing of college ESL students, an understanding based on a body of empirical data, will better prepare composition teachers of ESL to meet the writing needs of their students. The findings of such studies, based on a body of empirical data, apart from the contribution to knowledge of college ESL learners' mastery of the English language, will provide useful information for curriculum planners preparing writing courses in ESL, and for teaching methods in the ESL writing classrooms. These studies will also contribute knowledge to the field of applied linguistics by shedding some light on the difficulties and successes college ESL learners encounter in developing control over the written language.

It is hoped that more studies in the area of writing will focus on students for whom English is a second language. The results of such studies would be extremely useful to teachers preparing ESL students for college-level work both in the local and foreign institutions of higher learning.

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