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DEVELOPING LITERACY ACROSS CULTURES: SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF TEACHING ENGLISH WRITING IN SLOVENIA

Urška Sešek

English Department of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The article first outlines some reasons for sociological analysis of writing instruction in general, and presents writing and writing instruction as culture-specific social practices. It then focuses on the teaching of English writing in countries where English is a foreign language. One such country, which can be considered quite representative, is Slovenia, a post-bloc central European society, where writing instruction in both English and Slovenian has undergone major changes over the past decades. An empirical study has been carried out for an insight into writing instruction practices in the English and mother tongue classrooms in Slovenian grammar schools. The results of the comparison of national curricula, national exam materials and a selection of coursebooks for both language subjects show clear differences. Attempting to account for them opens up some interesting issues of linguistic and cultural transfer that could be probed for their sociological dimensions, most notably the issue of emprovement.

Key words: writing instruction, mother tongue, foreign language, culture-specific, curricula, coursebooks, external exams, transfer

1. WHY FOCUS ON WRITING

As noted in Street (1993), the theory of the Great Divide between oral and literate cultures has been related to seeing literacy and orality themselves as much more autonomous than recent research shows they are. However, there are still reasons to study them separately; and not only literacy or orality but also the productive / receptive side of each.

Systematic development of literacy has been increasingly important since the industrial revolution, when, for the first time in history, entire societies had to be equipped with the skills of reading and writing. Today's young people, especially those pursuing university degrees, will need to read incomparably more (and more efficiently) than their parents and grandparents ever did, as well as write a variety of effective texts, and in many contexts they will need to do both not only in their mother tongue but also in a second or even third

language. Modern language syllabi try to reflect this change, but often writing still gets less attention than reading, although there are arguments for a more equal balance.

In reading, we are recipients of other people's ideas (no matter how much we might interpret or use them in our own ways), while writing enables us to put our ideas out into the world and, hopefully, into other people's minds. From a sociological point of view, this means the difference between being influenced and exerting influence, which is related to issues of power (Fairclough 1989). Writing definitely empowers individuals and groups in different ways than other language uses. Different technologies are used to record, transmit and store writing than speech. Written texts have a different distribution, and often carry more weight, especially in societies where mass literacy does not have a long tradition. This is partly due to the special connection between literacy and schooling that orality does not share; its acquisition requires sustained, guided and conscious effort. For millennia, it has been available only to social elites, who used literacy and learning to establish and maintain supremacy over masses whose manual labor and poverty sustained the society. All these considerations point to a special importance of the skill of writing that surely has implications not only for its use but also for the means of its perpetuation - the writing instruction in schools.

2. THE TEACHING OF WRITING AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

If we consider writing embedded in a broad socio-historical context, it is clear that any kind of its pedagogical treatment produces certain social effects, which may or may not reflect explicit and official curricular goals. Regardless of the context of language teaching (mother tongue vs. second/foreign language, general language education vs. LSP), the very decision to include the writing skill into the syllabus has sociological implications. If we view teaching writing as a form of social empowerment (Foggart in Tribble 1996), it is clear that in contexts where writing is not taught at all or is marginalized, students are denied the proper opportunity to express their views and influence society through this mode of using language.

However, even when writing takes up a large part of a language course, this does not automatically result in meaningful empowerment. As Goody (1987) argues, writing removes ideas from their immediate context and thus makes their mental manipulation easier. This in itself gives even basic writers access to mental operations that are otherwise difficult to perform. However, beyond the sheer mastery of script, further levels of empowerment can be achieved through instruction in the conventions of written discourse (linguistic accuracy, text types, register, etc.), and exploration and mastery of the writing process. Thus, little empowerment can be expected to result, for example, from a language course in which writing is not taught in its own right but used as a mere classroom technique in the pursuit of other educational goals, and a degree more when students do a lot of writing, but are assessed against vague, inconsistent or implicit criteria. Somewhat better are settings in which students are required to imitate model texts, and criteria of good writing are in more or less plain view, but a crucial step further is taken when students are also taught about the cognitive processes

and strategies underlying the ability to produce effective texts of their own.

Another way of looking at the sociological effects of teaching writing goes back to the theory of linguistic relativity, and is valid regardless of the criticism the latter encountered over the years. The eloquent words of B. L. Whorf referring to language as a lexico-grammatical system could be applied also to the literacy skills in a particular language: '*a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which a personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationships or phenomena, channels his reasoning and builds the house of his consciousness.*' (1956: 252). Studies into the relatedness of cognitive development and the teaching of writing in schools in various ages and cultures have shown, unsurprisingly, that the two are not independent of each other; the acquisition of literacy in an individual is a major factor in his or her cognitive development, but in a pattern specific to his or her society (Grabe and Kaplan 1996). This implies that in each culture, new generations are taught through writing to prefer certain ways of thinking and conceptualizing of the world.

The fact that literacy is culture-specific because it is developed by schools 'prizing certain uses of language over others' (Kramsch 1998: 56) can be translated into the practicalities of how written discourse is treated in a writing classroom. Let us consider as an example the process of constructing a model of a well-written text through criteria for assessing student writing. If over a certain amount of time across a country's school system these criteria stress, for example, heavy usage of sophisticated vocabulary and high lexical density, this will give rise to a popular belief that good writing is sophisticated in terms of vocabulary. This further implies (although that may not have been an explicit educational goal) that writing with low lexical density or lacking foreign loanwords / complex word formation is bad writing. Of course, lexis is only one of many aspects of written text, but in effect whatever characteristic is focused on to represent 'good writing' always carries over to content, as students learn to associate the form of a 'well-written text' with the value of its message, its credibility, significance and persuasive power, and subconsciously continue to respond to texts in this manner as adult members of society.

3. CULTURAL SPECIFICITY OF WRITTEN DISCOURSE AND WRITING INSTRUCTION

Before attempting to discuss the sociological effects of foreign language writing instruction, let us first have a general look at the ways in which both written discourse and writing instruction are culture-specific, and how writing instruction helps maintain the cultural patterns it grows from.

3.1. CULTURE-BOUND: WRITTEN DISCOURSE

The development of linguistics with its branches such as discourse analysis and psycholinguistics has brought about the identification of an elaborate network of skills and knowledge involved in successful written communication. Let us have a look at a fairly

comprehensive list (adapted from Grabe and Kaplan 1996), which includes:

1. adherence to and meaningful violations of conventions regarding linguistic code (grammar, vocabulary, mechanics), register and style, text structure / organization of ideas, means of establishing cohesion and coherence, mechanisms for signalling status, situation, intent and attitude, mechanisms of informational structuring (new/old, specific/ abstract, probability of information...), and content of different text types;

2. audience-awareness (knowledge about reading strategies, expectations of target readers, adherence to and meaningful violations of Gricean maxims etc.);

3. mastery of text-composing processes and strategies (e.g. outlining, drafting, revising).

The culture-specific properties of written discourse as text (items under 1.) can be revealed by contrastive rhetoric research, which, ideally, applies a sound theoretical model of comparison to samples of mature prose from comparable text types in two or more languages. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) provide an overview of contrastive rhetoric studies published in the Anglo-Saxon countries since 1966. While some of the studies quoted are no longer considered valid and particularly early contrastive rhetoric was much criticized and debated, Grabe and Kaplan conclude that 'there is considerable evidence that different cultures have different rhetorical preferences for the organization of written text.' (197)

There has been less research into the culture-specific nature of the types of knowledge under 2. and 3. Some writers suggest that these are more universal (Friedlander 1990), but it seems safe to assume that if conventions of form, usage and interpretation differ, this must, at least to a small extent, also lead to preferred strategies of producing written discourse.

3.2. CULTURE-BOUND: THE CONTENT OF WRITING INSTRUCTION

Writing instruction in schools, whose goal is to equip students with the ability to participate in written disocurse within the society, must reflect the characteristics and conventions of written discourse established within that particular society. This means that the items enumerated under 3.1., which are culture-specific, constitute the content of writing instruction, which is thus also necessarily culture-specific. It would surely be simplifying the question of how patterned differences in written discourse across languages arose to attribute them solely to schooling, but writing instruction in schools certainly plays an important role in their perpetuation (as well as modification). This is done mostly through the choice of genres typically taught, with their characteristics presented as desirable or norm. The latter is reflected in three aspects of instruction:

- meta-knowledge about written discourse and writing processes presented to students;

- the content of feedback to student writing;

- the content of assessment criteria.

It is clear, for example, that a quasi-inductive style of Japanese writing reported in studies of Hinds (1987) must be reinforced by Japanese schools requiring students to study readings written in this style, by Japanese language teachers grading as excellent student essays written in the quasi-inductive style etc. Conversely, American writing instructors generally request students from primary school on to write in their essay introductions clear thesis statements, mark down essays for breaks in coherence, lack of paragraph unity or clear paragraphing etc.

3.3. CULTURE-BOUND: THE METHODOLOGY OF WRITING INSTRUCTION

It is widely recognized that culture plays an important role in foreign/second language teaching, but it is usually discussed mainly in terms of how it is present in instructional content (i.e. vocabulary or topics). However, cultural patterns, although in less obvious ways, are present also in the methodology of language teaching. As Auerbach puts it: 'The day-to-day decisions that practitioners make inside the classroom both shape and are shaped by the social order outside the classroom.' (1995:9)

Like content, the methodology of writing instruction can be broken down into several areas or components. Any particular language / writing course may include (in varying degrees) the following:

- mode of presenting knowledge about writing
- use or non-use of techniques for developing audience-awareness
- amount, timing and monitoring of feedback given to students on their writing
- use of peer collaboration between students
- techniques for teaching text composing strategies
- presentation and application of the criteria for assessing student writing.

These aspects of writing instruction may be treated quite differently in different cultural contexts. For example, peer collaboration techniques such as generating ideas in groups or peer feedback may be used extensively or they may not be used at all. Either approach has certain sociological implications. Where such techniques are used, students are being taught (whether this is an explicit curricular goal or not) that writing is a collaborative activity, and, indirectly, that the quality of written discourse profits from multiple authorship. This

kind of instruction may lead students to be more likely to seek peer feedback to their writing and embark onto joint authorship projects as adults. In contexts where peer collaboration techniques are not used, writing may be socially constructed as a solitary activity, which again affects the way students as adults will approach not only writing tasks but the construction and sharing of knowledge in all spheres of their activity.

Another sociological aspect of using peer revision activities in the classroom is that they are an important tool for developing audience awareness in young writers. If we can assume a link between audience awareness and a writer-responsible writing style, it seems likely that extensive practice of peer revision and other strategies for fostering audience awareness might result in students developing a more writer-responsible style of writing than students in settings where no such classroom techniques are used. While these are purely speculative observations, they do point to the fact that each curricular decision in the area of methodology may have complex and long-term effects, which go far beyond the mere acquisition of a skill.

4. *SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AT THE CONJUNCTION OF* MT *AND* FL *TEACHING OF WRITING*

In setting up foreign language classes whose aim is communicative competence (including proficiency in writing) we necessarily bring in characteristics of (written) discourse specific to the foreign society, which are always more or less different from our native patterns. We may also adopt teaching approaches specific to the foreign language / culture. In sociological terms, this means that our students are subjected to two parallel processes of social construction: one which happens in their mother tongue classes, and another in their foreign language classes. In the teaching of writing, these two processes are intricately interwoven in that students are exposed to two different models of what constitutes good writing, different perceptions of the writer-reader relationship and also different teaching approaches.

It is true that the majority of foreign language teachers in the world are not native speakers of the language they teach but speakers of the language they share with their monolingual student groups. This surely implies that teachers, at least to some extent, transfer to their teaching of a foreign language their knowledge of written discourse in their mother tongue as well as mother tongue teaching methodology. However, the more modernized foreign language teaching becomes, the more it relies on its own sources of information. This is particularly the case with English, whose spread has been driven by powerful political and economic forces (cf. Philipson 1992). As coursebooks and teacher training programs have been heavily imported from Great Britain and the United States, this has had a strong bearing on the content and the methodology of EFL instruction in general, and on EFL writing instruction in particular.

5. *THE CASE OF SLOVENIA: TEACHING WRITING IN ENGLISH AND SLOVENIAN*

5.1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Slovenia, a country in south-Central Europe which has gained independence from ex-Yugoslavia and shifted from a communist to a democratic, capitalist social order in 1990, has been no exception to the global boom of ELT in the past decades. This has been evidenced by many changes; an increase in the number of schools requiring students to take English as their first or only foreign language, increased duration of English courses, and mushrooming of private language schools capitalizing on the increasing public interest in learning English. A major step taken in the direction of more and better English instruction at secondary school level was the reintroduction of the national 'matura' (grammar school leaving exams) in 1994. New textbooks, new curricula and the accompanying in-service teacher training scheme have set higher standards of English instruction and linked it to a greater degree than that had been the case before to foreign ELT sources and standards. The change was particularly noticeable in the area of teaching writing in English, which had formerly been fairly neglected in Slovenian ELT. Today Slovenian teachers of English have at their disposal ELT textbooks which pay more and better-quality attention to writing than ever before, pre- and in-service teacher training offering more knowledge about writing and the teaching of foreign language writing than ever before, more access to publications on writing and teaching writing, general and English, than ever before, and even a specialized textbook written by Slovenian authors for helping grammar school students master the basics of expository writing in English (Sešek, Sokolov 2000).

Once writing began to be taught more extensively as a skill in its own right as part of EFL courses, and in doing so drew significantly on English-language sources, this began to invite (and, for the first time, enabled) comparisons with how writing instruction has been approached in teaching Slovenian as mother tongue. Language teachers and students, teacher trainers, policy makers and other stakeholders began to raise questions about transfer between foreign language and mother tongue instruction that had not been asked before. Do writing skills transfer from the mother tongue to the foreign language or vice versa and how? Between English and Slovenian, is this transfer desired? How does the teaching of writing in both languages in schools foster or impede this transfer? What kinds of attitudes and ways of thinking are we encouraging in our students by teaching them the conventions of Anglo-Saxon written discourse? What are the implications of using methodologies typical of writing instruction in English as the mother tongue but not traditionally practiced in Slovenian schools (e.g. essay conferencing and peer review activities)? How do all of these interplay with the literacy acculturation of our students in their mother tongue?

Obviously, the answers to these questions are not straightforward. They would require a complex analysis of the teaching of English and Slovenian at all levels of the Slovenian educational system and several factors beyond it. However, even focusing on grammar schools in an analysis of documents and materials most relevant to classroom practice yields some interesting observations and points to further research possibilities. (Grammar schools in Slovenia are four year schools preparing students aged 15 -19 for going on to university.)

It is of course not possible to make valid claims about what actually goes on in the schools without extensive classroom observation, but classroom practice is definitely shaped by and reflected in three main types of documents that are readily available for analysis. Firstly, the national curricula, which in Slovenia have been revised for all subjects for both primary and secondary schools in 1998 and have received a fair amount of publicity in the process, which, along with more administrative pressure from the Ministry of Education, has probably resulted in teachers now following the official curriculum more closely than before. In addition, there are two sources which certainly inform classroom practice more directly. The first of these is the textbooks used, since many teachers tend to use their coursebooks as the main source of classroom materials and thus, effectively, as their syllabi. The second such source is the national secondary school leaving exam (so called 'matura'), which has had a strong washback since its introduction, particularly in terms of content and course aims, and less in terms of teaching methodologies (Eržen 2000). For the purposes of this paper, I have used the most recent editions of the National Grammar School Leaving Exam Handbook, which serves as the best publicly available description of the exam, including its aims, requirements, sample test tasks and assessment criteria.

A further point must be made on the issue of textbook analysis. In Slovenia, grammar school teachers freely choose textbooks for their classes from what is available in the market, but there is a list of textbooks for each subject recommended by the Ministry of Education. Given the relatively small size of the market, it is fairly easy to establish informally which coursebooks are used the most extensively for any given subject, but it has unfortunately been impossible for the author of the article to access exact data. I have therefore chosen to analyse both existing grammar school textbooks for Slovenian as mother tongue (to the exclusion of those that deal only with literature), and three popular coursebook series from a growing list of EFL textbooks recommended for grammar schools.

Indeed, the three types of documents informing classroom practice should ideally promote the same course content and methodology for each respective course, and it should therefore suffice to just analyse one of them to get a general picture of what goes on in schools. However, as we will see, the three types of documents overlap only to a certain extent. In addition, EFL coursebooks for Slovenian grammar schools are all imported, and so produced in an entirely different context than curricula and exam handbooks for both languages, as well as textbooks of Slovenian. They each have different distributions and a different impact on actual classroom practice, and so it remains necessary to study all three types of sources.

In the documents I have analyzed, I have tried to establish the amount, the content and the explicitness of material related to writing, and how systematically exercises, explanations and methodology notes were included in the materials. I particularly looked for information regarding the text genres taught, as well as information regarding methodology of writing instruction. With the latter, I chose to focus on techniques such as enhancing audience awareness, writing process strategies and peer collaboration, because these, as a feature foreign to traditional Slovenian writing classrooms, have raised the most discussion among Slovenian experts and language teachers.

In drawing any kind of comparison between mother tongue and foreign language courses we must of course remember that these two necessarily play different roles in any country's school system because of their different sociocultural, economic and political dimensions. A foreign language course is likely, at least to a certain extent, to be seen as serving more utilitarian goals (e.g.enabling students to do business with foreigners), while mother tongue instruction, at least to a certain extent, as contributing to the formation of national identity and equipping with common language students from different linguistic / social / economic regions. A comparison is nevertheless possible and valid, at least on the grounds of an important shared goal: communicative competence.

5.2. SLOVENIAN vs. ENGLISH - CURRICULA

Let us first have a look at the Slovenian National Syllabus for Slovenian in Grammar Schools (Predmetna 1998a) and the Slovenian National Syllabus for English in Grammar Schools (Predmetna 1998b). The comparison reveals certain similarities as well as interesting differences in the amount and systematicity of prescribing content and methodology of writing instruction. In terms of the content of instruction, we can observe that both curricula treat in most detail the knowledge of linguistic code. In terms of text types and text composition conventions, the curriculum for Slovenian pays more attention to creative writing, style and genre distinctions, but considerably less to expository/argumentative writing, organization of text, informational structuring, establishing coherence, audience awareness and text composing strategies. In fact, the only reference to the text structure and coherence aspect is hidden in the repeated recommendation that students should follow the principles of 'appropriateness, comprehensibility and linguistic accuracy'. Indeed, detailed content specification is not the task of national curricula, but when we look at the syllabus for English, we see that it lists some notions absent from the mother tongue syllabus, such as structure of a paragraph, use of cohesive devices and functional sentence perspective. The English syllabus also has more stress on text composing strategies, while references made to them in the Slovenian syllabus are fragmentary and unsystematic.

A look at the methodological component of the syllabi for English and Slovenian reveals further differences. The English syllabus has more explicit recommendations regarding instructional strategies, among which we can find peer collaboration, multiple drafts and other components of a process approach to teaching writing, which are practically absent from the Slovenian syllabus. One recommendation in the English syllabus, for example, urges teachers to provide students with real readers of their writing beyond the teacher and even beyond the classroom setting (Predmetna 1998b: 20). The Slovenian syllabus, on the other hand, does not recommend any strategies for fostering audience-awareness

5.3. SLOVENIAN vs. ENGLISH - COURSEBOOKS

In one of the two existing non-literature mother tongue textbooks for Slovenian grammar

schools, called *Slovenski jezik in sporočanje* (Toporišič 1994), writing, similarly as in the National Curriculum, does not seem to get very systematic attention. The textbook covers language as a system in great detail. On pp. 171 - 177 the content and structure of narrative writing is discussed through five text types ranging from anecdote to journal. In the next chapter, a similar approach is used to deal briefly with expository writing. The last 10 pages of the textbook are devoted to writing under the title 'Practical stylistics'. This is a list of suggestions for good writing, with language accuracy at the top of the list, clarity, structure (no mention of concepts like thesis statement or paragraph), logic, being specific, and brief notes on the process of writing, in particular recommending revising and editing.

The more recent textbook series, called *Na pragu besedila* (On the Threshhold of Text) (Bešter 1999, Križaj-Ortar, Poznanovič, Bavdek and Končina 2000, 2001, 2002), has four levels, and material related to writing is included at each level. However, a fairly small portion of the textbook series talks about writing in an explicit way. The Level 1 Textbook introduces the concept of *'sporočanje'*, which is a term covering both the production of spoken and written text. Pages 42 and 43 discuss the phases of this process, which seem to relate only to writing, not to speech (working on ideas, sorting out the ideas, producing text), but this is not made very explicit. The Level 2 textbook is dedicated entirely to vocabulary study, the Level 3 textbook discusses accuracy issues in writing on pp. 5-63 and composing text on p. 67-72, which mostly focuses on cohesion at intra-sentence and sentence-to-sentence level. Two lines on p. 75 discuss the function of paragraph breaks. P. 86 describes a sample process of essay writing presenting an imaginary student, and shows a mindmap he used to outline his essay. In the Level 4 textbook, the only material related to writing is a presentation of functional text types on pp. 28 - 60. The workbooks accompanying the textbook series of course contain some writing practice, but this is almost exclusively model text analysis, sentence formation, gap filling and rewriting. The Teacher's Book contains detailed suggestions for dealing with materials and exercises in the coursebook and workbook, and a key for the latter.

On the EFL side, I chose for analysis three of the textbooks popularly used in Slovenian grammar schools. In the New Headway series (cf. Soars and Soars 1999, 2000), writing begins to feature at Pre-Intermediate level, but only in the workbook, where each unit presents a different text type and gives a prompt for students to write a similar text of their own. The latter does not feature in the Slovenian language textbooks or workbooks analyzed. At Intermediate level, the same approach is used in the textbook, but the writing activity is not always actual text production (sometimes it involves only correcting mistakes.) In the Upper-Intermediate level textbook, writing is included in every lesson, usually with a presentation of a model text and prompts for students to practice guided writing. There are some tips for the process of writing (eg. notetaking), the authors make suggestions about language to use as well as about the structure of the text to be produced. Collaborative writing is recommended only once in the entire series. The Prospects textbook series (cf. Wilson and Taylor 1999, Wilson, Taylor and Howard-Williams 2000) also has a Writing section at the end of each unit which is similar in principle to the Writing section found in New Headway, but Prospects encourages collaborative writing more. For example, the Upper-Intermediate level textbook, used in 3rd and 4th year grammar school English courses, explicitly recommends peer review

in Units 7 and 17, and peer review and writing in a group in Unit 16. The Reward textbook series (cf. Greenall 1997, Greenall and Pye 1998) also contains a Writing section at the end of each unit, which presents different text types. It gives students input on the phases of the process of writing and seems to have a systematic encouragement of collaboration in the writing process built into its blueprint. The Upper-Intermediate level textbook, for example, has storywriting in groups in Lessons 4 and 8, peer review in Lessons 5 and 9 and generating ideas in pairs in Units 10 and 14. In terms of text types, all three textbook series present letter writing, descriptive, narrative and discursive composition writing, forms, faxes, CVs, applications, invitations and similar functional text types.

The comparison of textbooks, in summary, shows primarily that writing is dealt with more systematically in English textbooks than in Slovenian ones, where it also tends to be discussed more implicitly. On both sides, stress is on expository/functional written discourse. In terms of methodology, most English textbooks have noticeably more stress on writing process strategies, giving students practice in writing full texts of their own, and peer collaboration.

5. 3. SLOVENIAN vs. ENGLISH - NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAVING EXAM

The 'matura' exam handbook for Slovenian (Republiška 2003a), which, of course, as the exams in all the 'matura' subjects, follows the aims of the subject as explicated in the National Curriculum, consists of three parts, of which writing a discursive or interpretative essay is the first. Both types of essay task (only one type is assigned in each exam) essentially require a fairly lengthy interpretation of prescribed literary works (700 - 1000 words required), the difference being that an interpretative essay is expected to be more substantial than a discursive essay. A more detailed explanation of the goals of the essay task has familiarity with the prescribed literary work and ability of its interpretation at the top of the list. Then follow 'ability to use and quote appropriate sources' and 'ability to use appropriate terminology', and then 'ability to produce a coherent, clear, concise and linguistically accurate text', and 'striving for a lively and original style' (Republiška 2003a: 5). Overleaf, 10 points elaborate the ability to interpret the prescribed literary text. The scoring achieved on the essay makes up 50 % of the final exam grade. The assessment criteria are not substantially more detailed than the criteria for assessing the English essay (pp. 9 do 11), but include a set of holistic criteria plus a set of analytic criteria. For either type of essay, the main assessment criterion is content. Ability to produce functional text types is tested in the second part of the written exam, where candidates have to demonstrate ability to interpret a reading passage (mostly through objective type tasks). Producing a short letter, report or similar text type is an additional test task, and this ability is listed last among the aims of this section of the test.

The 'matura' exam handbook for English (Republiška 2003b) mentions that the students should develop all four language skills already in the Preface. The list of exam goals includes as last three out of 9:

- ability to produce written texts according to conventions of different text types;
- ability to express one's opinions and interests, arguments and counterarguments in a coherent composition on a prescribed topic, and
- ability to use language means and strategies in written and oral production which are appropriate to cotext, context, communicative purpose and addressee.

The writing skill is tested through two essay tasks which together make up 30 % of the final exam grade. The first essay task involves guided writing of a shorter text, which is a functional text type such as letter, CV or report, and the second is usually a discursive or argumentative essay written in response to a chosen prompt. The assessment criteria for essay tasks consist of four bands: content, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and coherence, with equal weighting.

The main difference shown in this comparison is that the No. 1. required type of writing in Slovenian in grammar schools is interpretation of literary text, while in English it is the discursive essay. Functional writing seems more secondary in the Slovenian exam than in the English. Obviously, the exam handbooks offer no information suggesting teaching methodology, so comparison is only possible in terms of what teachers are likely to stress as the content of writing instruction in the respective language courses.

5. 4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Fully aware of the danger of broad generalizations and of the tentative character of the analysis conducted, we can still observe certain differences between writing instruction in Slovenia in two language subjects, the mother tongue and the first foreign language. They are related to both content and methodology of writing instruction, and are summarized in the following table.

SLOVENIAN	ENGLISH
• main types of writing: literary interpretation	• main types of writing: argumentative, functional
• stress on content, accuracy, and style	• stress on content, accuracy, structure and coherence
• no explicit promotion of audience-awareness, no prompts for collaborative writing	• incentives for explicit promotion of audience-awareness and collaborative writing
• little attention to text-composing processes and strategies	• more attention to text-composing processes and strategies

Surely these differences are attributable to several factors. For example the fact that courses in Slovenian as the mother tongue carry a strong emphasis on literature, particularly Slovenian literature, which is partly due to the role of schooling in shaping national consciousness. However, the question of where the differences stem from is perhaps not as urgent as the question of the educational consequences, particularly if we consider writing as a social practice. This study does not have enough theoretical or empirical scope to be able to support any conclusions, but it triggers interesting speculations. Are students transferring Anglo-Saxon rhetorical patterns to their writing in Slovenian or vice versa, or perhaps both? If the mother tongue courses construct writing as less of a functional skill than foreign language courses, do students (even if not encouraged to do so) transfer this view to their writing in the foreign language as well? If writing is constructed as a collaborative process in the foreign language courses, do students begin to view the writing process as more open in their mother tongue culture as well?

6. CONCLUSION

Written discourse in every language bears markings of cultural specificity at many levels, and this has to be taken into account in writing instruction that aims to equip students with communicative, strategic, sociocultural and discoursal competence (Council of Europe 1996). At the same time writing instruction always produces effects beyond competence in using language; it is a form of social construction in both its content and methodology.

From the point of view of communicative competence, the interaction between literacy instruction in the MT and literacy instruction in a FL means contrasts which result in either

negative or positive transfer. For example, a student using the conventions of a Slovenian curriculum vitae in an English class will do poorly because the conventions of the same text type in English are quite different. Text composing strategies, which also transfer well from one language to another (Friedlander 1990) can be transferred in a positive sense – if they are neglected in foreign language classes but stressed in MT classes, students can use them to improve their foreign language writing as well. If we considered only the goal of communicative competence, it would seem fairly clear that what we need to do is to try to predict and manage transfer. In this way we can hope to enable our students to successfully participate in written discourse in both their mother tongue and the foreign language.

A more complex set of issues emerges if we consider the social construction processes happening in writing classrooms in societies where students are extensively taught a second or a foreign language in addition to their mother tongue. Two school subjects providing literacy instruction, although taught on the common ground of the mother tongue culture, are rooted in two different languages, literacy systems, cultures and methodologies, which inevitably differ to some extent. The result is, whether this is an explicit instructional goal or not, that students are exposed to different attitudes to literacy processes and products as well as different social values, roles and relationships.

Here we can not easily identify the transfer between the mother tongue and foreign language, and even less can we make evaluations as to whether the transfer would be positive or negative. What, for example, is the effect on the Slovenian society of the fact that, since the reintroduction of the *matura* examinations, entire generations of grammar school students, the future elite of the nation, have been increasingly taught Anglo-Saxon writing using Anglo-Saxon methods in a school subject with almost the same number of lessons per year as their mother tongue? How does this interact with writing instruction in Slovenian, where there is more stress on creative writing and interpretation of literary text than functional / expository / argumentative writing, accompanied by a relative disregard of text composing strategies, audience-awareness and text organization?

These far-reaching questions concerning the broadest educational goals probably cannot be answered without a considerable body of contrastive linguistic, sociological and educational research, which could result in guidelines for Slovenian language teaching practice. A starting point, however, would be to raise our (English and Slovenian) teachers' and students' awareness of the following facts:

- Literacy skills and approaches to literacy development are culture-specific.
- Each culture, through its teaching of writing in schools, fosters a preference for one set of literacy skills and neglects others.
- The transfer of literacy skills and approaches to literacy development is cultural transfer.
- Teaching of writing in a certain language empowers students within the society / culture

which uses that language.

Instead of the last item on the list I would like to propose the idea of cross-cultural enrichment, or even cross-cultural empowerment through developing second/foreign language literacy. With sufficient awareness-raising provided, our students, by learning to write in a language other than their mother tongue, gain access to new literacy practices which they can utilize according to their own agendas. These new literacy practices can be either new in the sense that they are not contained in the learners' mother culture, or, which is even more likely, are a sort of hybrid between the literacy practices of their native culture and those of the foreign culture. In the end, whether we attempt to closely monitor and steer the learning process or not, between their mother tongue and foreign language classes and between two literacies (may they contradict and undermine or reinforce and complement each other), students are educated into a kind of a third culture (Kramsch 1993), a culture which becomes an inseparable part of who they are and how they function both within their native society and across its borders.

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RAZVOJ INTERKULTURALNE PISMENOSTI: SOCIOLOŠKA DIMENZIJA UČENJA ENGLESKOG PRAVOPISA U SLOVENIJI.

Sažetak

U članku se pokazuje važnost sociološke analize u učenju pisanja na stranome jeziku i ovladavanja interkulturalnim poučavanjem engleskoga kao stranoga jezika. U Sloveniji kao postblokovskom europskom društvu u posljednjih desetak godina došlo je do velikih promjena u učenju i poučavanju engleskoga i slovenskoga jezika. Provedena je studija o poučavanju engleskoga i materinskoga jezika u slovenskim gimnazijama. Rezultati usporedbe nacionalnih ispitnih materijala i izbora udžbenika za oba jezika pokazuju velike razlike. Pokušali smo pokazati neke zanimljive jezične i kulturne transfere i njihovu sociološku dimenziju.

Ključne riječi: poučavanje pravopisa, materinski jezik, strani jezik, kulturne posebnosti, životopis, udžbenici, eksterni ispiti, transfer