



Multicompetence in Second Language Academic Writing: Reframing Salient Topics in Writing Research Through the Lens of the Work of Vivian Cook

COLLECTION:
IN HONOUR OF
VIVIAN COOK

**SYSTEMATIC
REVIEWS AND
META-ANALYSES**

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WHITE ROSE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield & York

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an innovative exploration of second language academic writing through the lens of Vivian Cook's theories, particularly his concept of multi-competence, giving examples and recommendations of how the theory may be applied in the classroom. Initially, the paper discusses Cook's redefinition of bilingualism and its cognitive impacts, setting the theoretical foundation. It then moves onto the application of these theories in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), highlighting how Cook's ideas can transform teaching strategies and address the linguistic challenges faced by second language learners. Subsequent sections analyse the role of cultural and linguistic backgrounds in shaping academic writing styles, illustrating Cook's influence on understanding the dynamic between learners' first and second languages. The paper progresses by examining specific methodological approaches that can illuminate Cook's theories, such as the use of keystroke logging to study writing processes in real-time. Finally, it assesses the critical role of collaborative work and peer feedback in EAP, advocating for a balanced approach to instructor and peer review as a linguistically informed foundation to enhance learning outcomes in academic writing.

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KEYWORDS:

multi-competence; second language writing; EAP; cultural issues; collaborative writing; evaluating writing; feedback

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

McCray, D., & Hanks, J. (2024). Multicompetence in Second Language Academic Writing: Reframing Salient Topics in Writing Research Through the Lens of the Work of Vivian Cook. *Journal of the European Second Language Association*, 8(1), 177–191. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22599/jesla.129>

For those in tertiary-level education whose first language is not English, writing is a common source of difficulty. Underdeveloped writing skills are often mentioned as a key factor in the failure of students in meeting institutional literacy expectations. Researchers such as Hyland and Hyland (2001), Hyland (2003), Manchón (2001) and Roca de Larios et al. (2002) have worked to understand the challenges students face. Within the writing-focused paradigm, it is generally accepted that learners' academic performance largely depends on well-established general language and writing skills that are transferable to other contexts (see Zhu, 2004), for example, the logical organisation and development of texts, clarity of ideas, sentence structure, and grammar. However, the work of a key figure in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Vivian Cook, whose theories relate directly to the transfer of knowledge from one context/language to another, including in written modalities, is seldom discussed and critically evaluated in the academic writing literature.

Vivian Cook's work on SLA, particularly the notion of *multi-competence*, aims to redefine our understanding of bilingual and multilingual individuals (Cook, 1995, 2011). Cook's concept of *multi-competence*, similar to work by Grosjean (1985), challenged the traditional comparisons between multilingual speakers and monolinguals, suggesting that language learning and use in multilingual contexts create a distinct state of mind that cannot be measured solely against monolingual norms. Multi-competence addresses the misconception that knowledge of a second language (L2) is not the same as knowledge of the first (L1) (Cook, 1995). Instead, he posits that multi-competence encompasses the totality of an individual's language abilities, integrating both the L1 and any additional languages into a cohesive system (Cook, 2011). It is argued that integration affects not only linguistic abilities but also cognitive functions and processing, offering bilinguals or multilinguals a broader range of cognitive skills, such as enhanced problem-solving abilities and creativity (Bassetti & Cook, 2011; Cook, 2016). Moreover, Cook argued that L2 users should not be evaluated by the inappropriate standard of monolingual native speakers; rather, their abilities should be appreciated within the framework of their multi-competent capacities. This idea is echoed in parts of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) literature, though rarely directly attributed to Cook. For example, calls are emerging for a culturally aware, highly sensitive and responsive approach to writing pedagogy, which is cognisant of the influence of the writer's first language on their second language writing (Holliday, 2002; Hyland, 2003, 2006).

While Cook did not regularly apply these notions specifically to L2 academic writing, he did publish about writing in general (Cook, 2014). Cook considers that writing in SLA and language teaching research has been undervalued as the spoken form of language has enjoyed primacy in pedagogical theory through most of the twentieth century (Cook, 2016). He argues that writing is not simply a pictorial representation of speech, it is a parallel system for encoding and communicating meaning with its own rules and conventions and is, in fact, a primary mode of communication for numerous L2 users (Cook, 2005, 2014). According to Cook (2014), through writing, L2 learners consolidate their understanding of grammatical accuracy, lexical variation, and syntactic structures, which in turn enhances their overall language proficiency. This process enables learners to more actively engage with the target language and process it carefully and thoughtfully, in a way that would be difficult to achieve in spoken language due to its ephemeral nature. Cook (2005) also underscored the role of writing in fostering critical thinking and promoting cognitive growth, that is as learners engage in the process of composing texts, they are encouraged to organise their ideas coherently and think critically about the content they would like to convey in their texts. To date, Cook's ideas have not received a great deal of attention in the study of L2 academic writing research; however, we argue that many of his ideas have the capacity to usefully inform this field by bringing new perspectives to old problems and providing theoretical backing to guide researchers' insights.

This paper provides an innovative exploration of second language academic writing through the lens of Vivian Cook's theories, particularly his concept of multi-competence, giving examples and recommendations of how the theory may be applied in the classroom. Initially, the paper discusses Cook's redefinition of bilingualism and its cognitive impacts, setting the theoretical foundation. It then moves onto the application of these theories in EAP, highlighting how Cook's ideas can transform teaching strategies and address the linguistic challenges faced by second language learners. Subsequent sections analyse the role of cultural and linguistic backgrounds

in shaping academic writing styles, illustrating Cook's influence on understanding the dynamic between learners' first and second languages. The paper progresses by examining specific methodological approaches that can illuminate Cook's theories, such as the use of keystroke logging to study writing processes in real-time. Finally, it assesses the critical role of collaborative work and peer feedback in EAP, advocating for a balanced approach to instructor and peer review as a linguistically informed foundation to enhance learning outcomes in academic writing.

WRITING AS A TOOL FOR LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Cook (2005) posited that writing plays a crucial role in learners' cognitive development. It enhances their thinking abilities, facilitates the acquisition of correct form and meaning relationships in language, enables the expression and refinement of ideas, and fosters creative use of language. In line with Cook's view on how writing fosters cognitive growth, Swain's (1985) comprehensible output hypothesis adds a critical dimension by suggesting that language production, particularly in writing, serves as an essential mechanism for deeper cognitive processing and language development. Swain argued that it is not merely the exposure to language input that promotes learning, but the act of producing language that forces learners to process the language at a deeper level. When learners produce language, they must retrieve the correct linguistic structures from their knowledge base, thereby enhancing their linguistic competence. Writing, as a productive skill, helps learners notice gaps between what they know and what they need to master, promoting both language learning and critical thinking.

As highlighted by Ellis (2016), Hyland (2003) and Han and Hyland (2015), writing creates multiple opportunities to focus on form. Composing, the process of the creation of written text, is a relatively slow process in which writers have the opportunity to stop at any point and do some additional planning before continuing with the actual writing. According to Williams (2012), this seems to free up the attentional resources of the writer, which allows them to focus on certain aspects of written production such as accurate use of newly acquired grammatical or lexical forms. Primarily, literate learners rely on written language as a means to record events and information for future reference. They create personal vocabulary lists and take class notes, both of which serve as valuable resources that can be accessed whenever necessary. In essence, writing not only serves as a tool for communication but also as a cognitive aid and a means to preserve knowledge and insights. Relatedly, empirical studies have focused on the impact of EAP programs on the development of L2 learners' writing skills. Some were able to detect significant improvement in one or several aspects of students' academic writing (e.g., Hanks, 2015; Hanks, 2017; Mazgutova & Hanks, 2021; Mazgutova & Kormos, 2015; McCray & Hanks, 2023). Writing can be seen not only as a way of displaying what has been learned, but also as a tool for acquiring content knowledge, developing understanding, and improving students' critical thinking (Manchón, 2009).

In line with Cook's ideas about writing, some EAP scholars see the deliberate and thoughtful composition of written text as a particularly valuable tool for learning and examine it from the writing-to-learn perspective (e.g., Harklau, 2002; Manchón, 2011). These scholars posit that writing is not just a way to record what one already knows; instead, it is a powerful way to discover new knowledge and construct new understandings by uncovering new concepts, recognising patterns, and drawing conclusions. Writing-to-learn activities, such as concept mapping, annotated readings, reflective journals, help to activate what is already known, assist learners in seeing connections and reflecting on concepts and processes, and help develop their metacognitive skills. There exists a close connection between the exploratory nature of writing and its language learning potential. Writing acts as a linguistic exercise that allows them to gain *declarative* knowledge and makes them more adept at using the language in practice, i.e., writing proceduralises knowledge (Manchón & Roca de Larios, 2007). When learners are involved in meaningful communication in the L2, they tend to develop their declarative knowledge since, as indicated by Izumi (2003), "reflection on language may deepen the learner's awareness of forms, rules, and form-function relationship if the context of production is communicative in nature" (p. 170). When producing the language, learners notice the gap between what they already know and what they still need to master so that they can succeed in language production. Cook's theories on multi-competence suggest that writing plays a

vital role in cognitive development and language acquisition for second language learners. Writing not only aids in mastering grammatical accuracy and lexical variation but also fosters critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. This section underscores how deliberate writing activities can significantly enhance overall language proficiency, aligning with the writing-to-learn perspective. With this foundation, the discussion progresses to how cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence academic writing, reinforcing the idea that Cook's multi-competence can provide valuable insights into these dynamics.

LANGUAGE, INTER-LANGUAGE, AND CULTURAL ISSUES IN L2 ACADEMIC WRITING

Throughout his work on multi-competence, Cook is explicit about how a person's L1 and the culture with which it interfaces impact the production of the L2. Cook (2003, 2009) highlighted the dynamic relationship between first and second language acquisition. He addresses the concept of cultural transfer, where learners apply cultural norms and values from their native language to their second language. This can affect how they structure arguments, use rhetorical devices, and even express politeness in their writing (Cook, 2009). Learners might subconsciously rely on familiar patterns from their L1 writing when composing academic texts in English, leading to the incorporation of L1 writing conventions into their L2 writing. For students to learn to write in English, they not only need to learn the mechanics and rules of the language but also need to understand the hidden curriculum (Giroux & Penna, 1979) related to academic writing. This includes grasping the implicit cultural norms, rhetorical structures, audience expectations, and genre conventions that govern academic writing in English. This hidden curriculum encompasses understanding the subtleties of argumentation, the use of evidence, stylistic nuances, and the appropriate level of formality, all of which may differ significantly from the conventions in their first language. Recognising and adapting to these unwritten rules is a necessary and difficult step for learners to produce writing that meets the expectations of English-speaking academic contexts.

Scholars in EAP, such as Clark and Sampson (2007), Wolfe (2012), and Wolfe and Britt (2008) have identified common problems students face with academic writing, including difficulties with grammatical accuracy, lexical complexity, coherence, cohesion, and the ability to appropriately adopt and adapt cultural norms and rhetorical styles expected in academic discourse. The association between culture and language and writing underscores the role of socialization and the influence of the L1 in the development of an individual's writing style. Individuals are embedded in communities, each using different language systems, possessing distinctive norms, values, and expectations regarding effective communication. These cultural and linguistic norms become an essential frame of reference that guides writers in selecting appropriate vocabulary, sentence structures, and rhetorical strategies. In essence, writers internalize the cultural practices of their community, and these practices inevitably manifest in the form and content of their written work (Hyland, 2022). While language and culture are inextricably linked, they are not one and the same (Jiang, 2000). Valuable insights into effective teaching strategies could be gathered more efficiently if future EAP literature decouples these two concepts and focuses, as Cook suggests, on how L1 processing interferes with the production and learning of L2, rather than on the harder-to-define and measure concept of culture.

One important area in which the L1 influences the L2 in the production of academic writing is in the area of argumentation. At the tertiary level, L2 students are expected to use research-based evidence in their arguments. Argumentation is central to L2 learners' academic writing and assessment (Chuang & Yan, 2023), highlighting one's L2 academic writing ability (Hirvela, 2013; 2017). Indeed, Cook (1999) notes that texts incorporating both arguments and counterarguments are more convincing, a view supported by many scholars (Chuang & Yan, 2022; Stapleton & Wu, 2015). However, L2 writers often struggle to include alternative views and justify their claims (Wolfe, 2012; Wolfe & Britt, 2008). Without explicit instruction, few students succeed in mentioning opposing views (Knudson, 1992, 1994; Wolfe & Britt, 2008; Yasuda, 2023). Learners' difficulty with argumentation often stems from misunderstanding academic argument characteristics in English (Bitchener, 2017; Jin et al., 2020). Although they recognise argumentation's importance, many struggle with its actual components (El Majidi et al., 2023; Liu & Stapleton, 2020; Pessoa et al., 2017). L2 learners face the dual challenge of

language and argument complexity (Jin et al., 2020). They must formulate coherent arguments, provide convincing evidence, and logically organise ideas to persuade audiences. Effective argumentation also requires sensitivity to other perspectives, engaging with reading materials critically and incorporating authors' claims into their own writing (Andrews, 2007; Yasuda, 2023). Studies indicate that despite its seemingly straightforward structure, many L2 learners struggle with argumentative writing at secondary and post-secondary levels (Andrews, 2007; Wingate, 2012; Bitchener, 2017; Hirvela, 2017; Yasuda, 2023). Argumentation is not explicitly taught in most UK universities, further complicating learners' efforts (Wolfe et al., 2009). Some scholars argue that argumentation should be taught explicitly alongside reading, writing, and arithmetic (Britt & Larson, 2003; Cook, 2009). Wingate (2012) suggests L2 learners struggle due to either a lack of awareness of argumentation or only a partial understanding from previous education. However, Cook's ideas provide an alternative explanation.

Argumentation styles vary across linguistic and cultural landscapes, reflecting deep-rooted social, educational, and rhetorical traditions. For example, Far Eastern argumentation is characterised by its indirectness and emphasis on harmony, often manifesting through non-confrontational language and passive constructions as noted in studies by Hazen (1986) and Hinkel (1997; 2005). This approach contrasts with Western norms, particularly in American and European contexts, where argumentation is direct and assertive, favouring clear thesis statements and logically supported claims, a reflection of cultural values that prioritize explicit communication and logical coherence (Connor, 1996; Kaplan, 1966). Educational frameworks also play a pivotal role in shaping these argumentative styles. In collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan, China, Korea), education may stress community values and harmony, promoting a more indirect style of argumentation, while Western educational systems, which champion individualism, encourage a direct and clear expression of ideas (Kubota, 1998; Leki, 1991). Furthermore, the rhetorical traditions specific to each language influence argumentation styles. Spanish, for instance, often features elaborate formal structures typical of Romance languages, deeply embedded in a rich rhetorical education tradition (Connor & Lauer, 1988), whereas East Asian rhetorical practices might emphasize aesthetic and moral qualities, reflecting historical and philosophical influences (Uysal, 2012). The impact of a speaker's first language on their second language argumentation is also significant. Non-Western speakers often apply the rhetorical and argumentative structures of their first language when writing in English, which can sometimes lead to challenges in meeting the expectations of Western academic writing norms (Kubota & Lehner, 2005; Matsuda, 1997). Despite these differences, there is an emerging recognition of some universal practices in argumentation that transcend cultural boundaries, such as the organisation of text and the strategic use of evidence and claims to support arguments (Cahill, 2003; Connor, 1987).

Notable pedagogical implications can be drawn from Cook's work related to the influence of the L1 and its cultural milieu on the L2. First, L2 learners would benefit from help with the development of their academic writing in English. They need to be engaged in the actual process of writing from the very beginning by getting adequate exposure to academic writing conventions in the English as a Second Language (ESL) context. To be able to produce well-written academic essays, learners should develop awareness of academic register in English and be equipped with various writing strategies. If the learner is already a proficient academic writer in their L1, they should explicitly be asked to enumerate and highlight differences between conventions in their L1 and L2 to help them become cognisant of them. For academic writing in English, they should be taught to read extensively and use scholarly ideas to support and challenge their own arguments. Since vocabulary has been identified by researchers as one of the biggest challenges student-writers reported facing before studying on the EAP programs (Mazgutova & Hanks, 2021; Mazgutova & Kormos, 2015; McCray & Hanks, 2023), tutors might consider directing their students to appropriate resources which can assist them with enriching their academic lexicon in English. Research also suggests that the use of good academic essays produced by other learners (e.g., Mazgutova & Hanks, 2021) and/or collaborative writing (e.g., Pham, 2021) might assist student-writers considerably by serving as a model of skilful writing and as a source of inspiration by enabling them to attempt to improve the academic style, clarity, cohesion, and linguistic accuracy of their texts. Imitating the writing style of other more skilled student-writers should help students make their own writing more academic.

The development of L2 learners' writing ability has mostly been investigated in terms of improvements in various assessment criteria, such as cohesion, coherence, and organisation (see below), as well as overall grades (e.g., [Green & Weir, 2002](#)). It is only relatively recently that writing research and studies in the field of EAP have started to focus on linguistic features of student writing and how they improve along with developments in proficiency in various instructional contexts. A common approach to this kind of research in L2 writing involves quantitatively examining written texts produced by L2 learners for various linguistic features including lexical sophistication, syntactic complexity, cohesion, and text structure of the written texts. Computational analyses of texts allow researchers to accurately analyse a large amount of data in a limited period of time ([Ferris, 2016](#)). Online tools particularly effective in Second Language Writing (SLW) research which measure these kinds of linguistic features include *Coh-Matrix* ([Graesser et al., 2004](#)), *Synlex* ([Lu & Ai, 2011](#)) and *VocabProfiler* ([Cobb, 2020](#); [Heatley, Nation & Coxhead, 2002](#)). These tools analyse the product of written text production, however, real time cognitive processing during text creation is not something that can be easily inferred by looking at the product of writing. Another related approach to analysing written text, keystroke-logging, allows the analysis of the process of written text production.

[Cook \(2009\)](#) discusses how L1 and L2 language users have different cognitive processes when producing language. In order to investigate this contention, it is necessary to use an approach which can measure moment-to-moment processing in writing. Keystroke logging is one such approach. Keystroke-logging software such as Inputlog ([Leijten & Van Waes, 2006/2013](#)) has been used by a number of SLW scholars (e.g., [Mazgutova & Kormos, 2015](#), [Mazgutova & McCray, 2023](#); [Révész, Kourтали, & Mazgutova, 2017](#)) to date, to investigate writing processes, revision behaviours, and strategies used by L2 writers on EAP courses at the universities. Expanding on this, [Michel et al. \(2020\)](#) employed a combination of keystroke logging, eye-tracking, and stimulated recall to study the differences in writing behaviours and cognitive processes across independent and integrated writing tasks. Their research found that independent tasks showed distinct patterns in writing speed and pausing behaviours, while integrated tasks revealed more dynamic and varied cognitive activities throughout the writing process. This comprehensive approach underscores the complexity of L2 writing and the need for diverse methodologies to fully understand it.

[Mazgutova and McCray \(2023\)](#) conducted their research with undergraduate students on a pre-sessional EAP programme. The detailed computer-generated keystroke logging data was retrieved to provide valuable insights into students' online writing processes. Using process-based keystroke logged measures of writing fluency, that is, pauses and bursts, helped the researcher map the writing process in great detail and enabled them to assess all text produced during the writing episode rather than analysing only the text of the final draft. Thus, instead of focusing on the total amount of time spent writing, keystroke logged measures enabled [Mazgutova and McCray \(2023\)](#) to examine the location and duration of pauses considered to be indicative of moment-to-moment cognitive processing.

Acquiring proficiency in a second language results in comprehensive shifts in thinking patterns, language knowledge, and language use. As highlighted by [Cook \(2012\)](#), "learning a L2 is not just adding an extension to the exterior of your house; it is rebuilding most of the interior walls" (p. 63). Just as renovating a house involves extensive planning, effort, and resources, acquiring a second language involves substantial cognitive investment. Individuals must re-examine their existing thought processes, linguistic patterns, and even cultural perspectives. Learners should be encouraged to take risks with the language, which could have a positive influence on their writing skills. They might be involved in some free writing activities. Completing learning journal entries on a regular basis might enable students to get extensive writing practice, help them to overcome their fears and challenges with academic writing, and assist them in terms of goal setting for the future ([Mazgutova & Hanks, 2021](#); [McCray & Hanks, 2023](#)). Learning journals or reflective logs bring access to cognitive processes of L2 writers as they make decisions about the content and language of their texts. One of the undeniable advantages of using this research tool is their comparatively non-intrusive nature ([Mazgutova & Hanks, 2021](#)). Learning logs appear to be less threatening to the students than many other research methods, that is interviews, since their completion does not require face-to-face contact with the researcher and does not set rigid time restrictions, that is the entries can be filled at any time that is convenient for the student.

A more radical form of research which has recently entered the field is the notion of Exploratory Practice (Hanks, 2015, 2017, 2019a, 2020). Learners are encouraged to actively investigate their own learning practices. As stated by Cook (2016), “students have minds of their own; ultimately, they decide how they are going to...achieve the goals of their learning (p. 132). This aligns with the philosophy underpinning Exploratory Practice and much practitioner research in EAP (see Hanks, 2019a, 2019b, 2020). While much of the early work took place in Brazil with teachers and learners in state schools at primary and secondary level, Hanks (2015) has broken new ground in attempting an Exploratory Practice approach in an EAP setting in the UK. Two case studies (Hanks, 2015, 2017) using multimodal research methods followed learners on intensive pre-session courses as they a) identified research questions (puzzles), b) worked collaboratively to investigate their puzzles, collecting and analysing data, c) collated and presented their findings via poster presentations, and d) wrote up their work in collaboratively written group assignments. The students were interviewed at regular intervals, and their comments following the written work phase were particularly revealing. This use of active investigation of pedagogy for developing learner insights into their writing is very different from the more traditional forms of research into SLW. These focus on, for example, analysis of the written feedback from teachers to students (Hyland & Hyland, 2001) or comparisons of student responses to teacher or peer feedback (Miao et al., 2006). With these methodological insights in mind, we can apply Cook’s theories to the classroom environment.

ENHANCING ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS IN ESL/EAP CLASSROOMS

The importance of SLW and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners’ difficulty with it are reflected in the emphasis given to academic writing skills on pre-session and in-session EAP programmes at higher educational institutions around the world. English for Academic Purposes has been defined as teaching English to facilitate study and research in that language (Harwood & Petrič, 2011). In other words, EAP goes beyond general language instruction by tailoring its content and methodologies to cater to the specific demands of academic settings. The purpose of EAP is not merely to add to or ‘top up’ a learner’s general language skills, but rather to cultivate a new set of literacies that are essential for effective communication within academic environments (Hyland, 2019, Harwood & Petrič, 2011). Since English has become more widespread as an international language, the need for a more specialised teaching of English for various specific purposes has also grown, such as English for business, English for engineering, English for science, English for maths. EAP has therefore flourished as a field for second language teaching research including academic writing (see Evans & Green 2007; Hanks, 2015, 2017; Harwood & Petrič, 2011; Hyland 2002; Jordan, 1997, 2002; Mazgutova & Kormos, 2015; Mazgutova & Hanks, 2021; McCray & Hanks, 2023; Reid 2001; Zamel & Spack, 1998; Zhu 2004).

A great value of EAP instruction in academic writing has been illustrated in the SLA and writing research. For example, Evans and Green (2007) revealed how targeted EAP interventions can markedly improve learners’ linguistic competence as well as their ability to engage with scholarly content more critically and meaningfully contribute to academic discussions. Although EAP courses might focus on improving learners’ levels of English language proficiency (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002), their ultimate aims lie in equipping learners with relevant academic and study skills (Hanks, 2015; 2017; Mazgutova & Hanks, 2021) as well as familiarising them with academic writing genres. Thus, EAP programs are crucial not just for language improvement but for equipping learners with essential academic and writing skills necessary for their disciplines. However, two types of classroom practice are particularly relevant, in our view, for aiding a linguistically-informed multicompetent approach to developing written EAP skills – collaborative feedback and targeted feedback.

COLLABORATIVE WRITING

Within the realm of EAP, collaborative writing is recognized as a highly effective method, as it directly contributes to enhancing both language skills and attitudes and it has been advocated for adoption in the writing classrooms all over the world (Pham, 2021; Storch, 2017; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007). By working together on writing tasks, learners are exposed to diverse perspectives, constructive feedback and alternative approaches, which could deepen their understanding of writing concepts and improve their writing skills. Cook (2001) suggested that

learners' attitude towards the second language play a significant role in their language learning process, and collaborative writing is likely to contribute to shaping these attitudes positively. When students work together on writing tasks, they tend to engage in discussions, provide feedback to each other and collectively solve language-related problems. This collaborative process, according to Cook, could help build their confidence and motivation in using the L2, as learners receive support and encouragement for their peers. Collaborative writing provides learners with increased exposure to the L2 through interaction with their peers. This exposure could contribute to a more positive attitude towards the language, as learners begin to perceive it as a tool for communication and collaboration rather than solely as an academic subject.

Recent studies have shown that collaborative writing, particularly when combined with model-based feedback, has proven highly effective in improving learners' writing skills (e.g., Cahusac de Caux, & Pretorius, 2024; Pham, 2021; Zheng, Yu, & Lee, 2021). Collaborative writing encourages learners to actively engage in the process of co-constructing texts, which fosters deeper reflection on their own language use, argumentation, and organisation of ideas. In this interactive context, learners benefit from peer collaboration as they discuss, negotiate, and problem-solve together, further reinforcing their understanding of writing conventions and linguistic accuracy. By engaging learners with examples of more skilled student-writers' work, model-based feedback allows students to see concrete examples of academic style, clarity, cohesion, and linguistic accuracy, helping them to elevate their own writing (Elabdali, 2021; Manchón & Roca de Larios, 2007). Learners are able to see how complex ideas are structured, how evidence is incorporated to support arguments, and how coherence is maintained throughout a text, all of which are essential skills in academic writing. The use of these model texts, particularly in collaborative settings, offers learners both inspiration and guidance as they attempt to mirror the writing processes of more skilled peers, which leads to improved academic writing performance.

Second language writing research shows that collaborative writing assignments have become increasingly popular in tertiary academic settings (e.g., Storch, 2017; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007; Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). Collaborative writing is defined by Storch (2017) as "co-authoring of a single text by two or more writers" (p. 130). However, simply constructing a text together by a group of L2 student-writers is very unlikely to promote their language learning. This form of writing poses some challenges to L2 learners, particularly when they are grouped with native speakers or highly fluent non-native writers, as they may become passive and contribute only minimally to the collaborative writing task. To address this problem, SLW scholars (e.g., Cook, 2001; Elabdali, 2021; Manchón, 2011; Shehadeh, 2011) propose introducing some collaborative tasks prior to engaging learners in cooperative writing activities. The main distinction between these two types of writing is that the former involves a division of roles among all members of the group. Thus, as suggested by Manchón (2011), each student can, for example, be responsible for drafting one specific section of the assignment, which opens up the opportunity for learning to write. Unlike collaborative tasks, cooperative writing presumes active involvement of all members of the group in all stages of the writing.

While cooperative learning might not have a direct impact on attitudes towards the L2 and its associated culture, its reputation as an approach that fosters a supportive and motivating learning environment implies a potentially positive influence on attitude overall. Cook (2001, pp. 119–123) highlighted that writers' feelings, beliefs and perceptions about the L2 could play an important role in sharing their learning experiences and outcomes. The inherent characteristics of cooperative learning such as promoting engagement, shared problem-solving, and a sense of belonging might indirectly contribute to cultivating a more positive attitude in L2 learners. In other words, by nurturing a collaborative atmosphere, cooperative learning can potentially enhance student-writers' self-perceptions, their views on the learning process, and their readiness to engage with linguistic and cultural aspects of the L2 in a more receptive manner.

One of the benefits of collaborative writing lies in its language learning potential. As indicated by Williams (2012), learners tend to co-construct knowledge by taking part in collaborative activities that involve writing. Collaboration has been found to be efficient in terms of language learning, in particular, as far as language accuracy improvement is concerned (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007). Cook (2009) suggested that collaborative writing activities can be beneficial as they encourage peer interaction, feedback, and the sharing of ideas. Collaborative writing fosters a sense of community among learners and provides opportunities for collaborative problem-solving. Interacting with peers' perspectives is likely to positively impact

student-writers' argumentation, as proposed by Su et al. (2021). This suggests that students are more likely to develop comprehensive arguments when they actively engage in discourse, such as by *challenging, elaborating or revising*, as compared to solely introducing new concepts without critical evaluation. Students would not only refine their own arguments but also gain valuable insights from the perspectives of their peers, leading to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the topic. Hence, collaborative writing process fosters intellectual growth and encourages students to approach argumentation with a more critical mindset (Su et al., 2021).

The language learning potential of writing is associated with problem solving behaviours that L2 learners discover while composing their collaborative writing assignment. The depth of problem-solving depends on the mental models of writing which constitute various beliefs, feelings and thoughts of the writers that guide their performance. For example, Manchón and Roca de Larios (2011) conducted a study the participants of which were L1 Spanish speakers of advanced English language proficiency taking a nine-month EAP course. Upon completion of the course, the students reported on the changes that took place in their conceptualisation of the writing process and writing product. Regarding the process of writing, they described writing composition as based on problem solving which, in its turn, consists of decision making and rewriting. In the process of text production, the learners appear to focus on ideational, linguistic and textual dimensions; thus, they developed more multidimensional mental models of writing. Manchón and Roca de Larios (2011) clearly demonstrated that over the course of nine months of studying on the EAP programme, learners were able to make major progress in their communicative abilities, organisation of texts, and linguistic ability to write appropriately in the target language. Holistic analysis of the academic essays produced at the beginning and at the end of the EAP course showed statistically significant improvement on nearly all measures targeted in the study including argumentation, appropriacy, organisation and communicative ability. Thus, having reviewed a number of descriptive and interventionist studies, Manchón (2011) concluded that writing fosters "linguistic processing with potential learning effects" (p. 70). These processes might include noticing and attentional focus on form, formulation of hypotheses about language forms and functions, testing these hypotheses via getting corrective feedback from peers on one's own language, generating and assessing language through the use of explicit and implicit knowledge and by means of cross-linguistic comparisons.

TARGETED FEEDBACK

According to Cook (2016), "teachers have...always corrected and always will" (p. 246). As highlighted by Cook, learners tend to complain when their teachers do not provide them feedback on their work rather than when they provide too much feedback. The provision of written feedback is one of the most important tasks of a teacher, which offers ESL/EFL learners an invaluable opportunity to get "individualised attention that is otherwise rarely possible under normal classroom conditions" (Hyland & Hyland, 2001, p. 185). It is important for teachers to realise that the feedback they offer to their learners needs to be as balanced as possible. It should not only be focused on criticisms, i.e., negative reactions to students' writing, but also contain sufficient amount of praise, i.e., positive comments on various aspects of students' writing. As rightly pointed out by Hyland and Hyland (2001), teacher's written feedback should also contain some constructive suggestions for further improvement or so-called 'constructive criticism'. The findings of previous studies on written feedback have clearly shown that although learners highly appreciate teacher's positive comments on their writing, they would much rather prefer to receive some constructive suggestions for improvement (see Ferris, 1995). Student-writers appear to feel misled by abundant praise and mitigation used in teacher's feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Also, some students consider excessive positive comments used by the teacher as insincere. Therefore, it is important that teachers should attempt to use the wording for their written feedback with care and try to avoid referring to praise simply for the purpose of softening words of criticism.

Receiving teacher feedback appears to be critical for learners' development as academic writers because it tends to be clearer and more comprehensive than other types of feedback (Mazgutova & Hanks, 2021; Yang et al., 2006). One of the likely reasons for teacher feedback being popular among L2 writers is the expertise, knowledge, and skill that the teachers are assumed to possess. Importantly, the feedback given by the teacher needs to be balanced, that is focused on both strengths and weaknesses of students' writing and give valuable and appropriate suggestions for student-writers' further improvement (Yang et al., 2006).

However, there are many instances in research and practice where teacher feedback does not seem to drive active improvement. Similar to the principles of successful collaborative work outlined above, embedding peer work into feedback processes, if carefully scaffolded, can be an important way of building second language confidence, competence and autonomy. Cook (2016) pointed out that when learners work together in pairs or groups, “the teacher no longer dominates..., controlling and guiding students every minute. Rather he or she takes some step back and hands the responsibility...over to the students” (p. 276). However, the feedback given by their peers seemed to be underestimated and at times neglected by the students. The SLW research shows that both teacher and peer feedback aid learners in the development of their academic writing skills (Zhang et al., 2023; Yu, 2020). Although both types of feedback are being used by student-writers, teacher feedback tends to be given a notable preference (Yang et al., 2006). One of the explanations students gave during the interviews was that they considered their teacher experienced, trustworthy, and professional; therefore, they particularly valued teacher feedback. An analogous situation was observed by Mazgutova and Hanks (2021). The findings of the interviews have clearly demonstrated that the vast majority of learners on the EAP course highly appreciated tutor feedback and tended to address their teachers whenever they needed further clarification, explanation, or other support with any aspect of their academic writing (Yu et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Students should be encouraged to use peer support by working with their classmates, developing group posters, presenting those to other groups of students and getting feedback from their peers (see Mazgutova & Hanks, 2021). Despite being attended to less than teacher feedback, peer feedback was found to be more conducive to successful revision and self-correction (Yang et al., 2006). The comparison between teacher feedback and peer feedback shows that both types of feedback should be used by students but with slightly different aims in mind and at different stages of the writing process.

The importance of second language writing and the challenges faced by ESL learners have been well-documented in EAP programmes globally. EAP equips learners with specific academic literacies necessary for effective communication in scholarly environments. Research has shown that targeted EAP interventions can significantly enhance linguistic competence and academic skills, facilitating meaningful engagement with academic content. Collaborative writing within EAP has been recognised for enhancing language skills and positively shaping learners’ attitudes towards the second language. It fosters a supportive environment, enabling learners to co-construct knowledge, improve language accuracy, and develop argumentation skills through peer interaction and feedback. Moreover, balanced and constructive feedback, both from teachers and peers, plays a critical role in developing ESL learners’ academic writing skills. Combining both feedback types can provide a more holistic and supportive approach to improving academic writing proficiency in second language learners.


CONCLUSION

This essay has explored second language academic writing through the lens of Vivian Cook’s influential theories, particularly his concept of multi-competence. Cook’s redefinition of bilingualism has provided a fresh perspective by presenting language acquisition in bilingual individuals as an integrated whole linguistic system rather than separate entities. This perspective has the potential to enrich our understanding of multilingual learning environments, emphasising that bilingual individuals should be viewed through their unique, multi-competent capacities rather than being compared to monolingual norms. The application of Cook’s multi-competence framework within EAP highlights its potential to inform educational settings by leveraging the cognitive and linguistic advantages of bilingualism. By adopting Cook’s perspective, EAP programmes may develop pedagogical strategies that not only enhance academic writing skills but also foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Cook’s theories provide a useful theoretical foundation for understanding the complex interplay between a learner’s first and second languages, which can help in addressing the specific challenges faced by ESL learners. Furthermore, the emphasis on collaborative writing within Cook’s framework aligns with his view of language learning as a socially situated process. Collaborative writing fosters a supportive environment, allowing learners to co-construct knowledge, improve language accuracy, and develop argumentation skills through peer interaction and feedback. This collaborative approach is consistent with Cook’s ideas about the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, such as enhanced problem-solving abilities and creativity.

Balanced and constructive feedback, a cornerstone of effective EAP instruction, can also be linked to Cook's theories. His emphasis on multi-competence suggests that feedback should not only focus on language accuracy but also on leveraging the learner's existing linguistic and cognitive resources. This holistic approach to feedback, combining both teacher and peer input, aligns with Cook's view that bilingual individuals have unique strengths that should be nurtured.

The implications of Cook's work for future research in EAP are noteworthy. There is a need for empirical studies to explore and refine the application of multi-competence theory in academic writing instruction. Investigating the impacts of Cook's integrated pedagogical strategies on learner proficiency and academic success would provide valuable insights to support their adoption. Additionally, extending research to include diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds could further elucidate the universal and specific aspects of second language academic writing, thus continuing to build on Cook's work in the field.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

McCray, D., & Hanks, J. (2024). Multicompetence in Second Language Academic Writing: Reframing Salient Topics in Writing Research Through the Lens of the Work of Vivian Cook. *Journal of the European Second Language Association*, 8(1), 177–191. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22599/jesla.129>

Submitted: 03 June 2024**Accepted:** 01 October 2024**Published:** 19 November 2024**COPYRIGHT:**

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Journal of the European Second Language Association, is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by White Rose University Press.