

Balancing structuralism and poststructuralism in EFL writing instruction and assessment

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Abstract

Structuralists maintain that every human action, including writing a text, is governed by an underlying structure. One probably agrees with this notion when considering how English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing is taught and learned. Much of what EFL writing teachers apply is the knowledge created by structuralists—ranging from how words are formed to how an essay is organized. However, while structuralist methodologies provide grammatical knowledge and organizational skills indispensable for good writing, they are often viewed as depriving students of their freedom to think critically, and thus to discover knowledge by and for themselves. On the other hand, poststructuralists believe that knowledge is a collage or a juxtaposition of pieces of information. For poststructuralists, differences create knowledge, which is by no means stable. Poststructuralists, therefore, suggest that we teach our students to look at a thing, a person, or a topic from all directions. By so doing, our students become more critical and knowledgeable. With the belief that education is growth both in skills and in knowledge, it is advisable that EFL writing teachers combine concepts of structuralism and poststructuralism.

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To look into the teaching and assessing of EFL writing assessment insightfully, there are some questions to try to answer: “What governs the way we teach and assess students’ writing?” “What teaching methods and grading criteria do we normally use?” “Why do we use them, and are they sufficient?” Asked with these questions, many of us think of grammar and organization. It is grammar because most of our students are so poor at grammar. It is organization because we have long learned that writing should be well-organized, that is, by having an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, and by making ideas and paragraphs move smoothly, logically, and coherently through the use of transitional devices. A good organization conveys the writer’s message easily. Thus, grammar and organization are invariably emphasized in our instruction and assessment. However, many of us, too, think of content and language use. It is not enough for students to learn just that they should start with a good introduction ending with a thesis statement, that they should start all body paragraphs with a topic sentence and stick to it, and that they should use transition signals both inside and between paragraphs. There should be enough supporting details, all of which should be logical. In addition, the language used should manifest the competence the student should have acquired for his or her level of education.

However, for a good insight into our instruction and assessment, we should not answer just only those questions asked above but also consider the theories involved. We should also rethink the advantages and disadvantages of our traditional methods and consider new ways that we may adopt.

This paper is discussing two contrasting theories, structuralism and poststructuralism, as a way to better understand the way we teach and evaluate writing, and also to see what improvements we may make. The paper will firstly explain what structuralism is and discuss how it might affect the way we teach and evaluate writing, and also the way our students learn. Secondly, it will elaborate on poststructuralism and its possible benefits. Thirdly, it will suggest how we might combine structuralist and poststructuralist concepts together for a better method of teaching and assessing writing. The title of this essay contains the word “balancing,” which is straightforward. The main job of this paper is to point out that both structuralist and poststructuralist concepts are equally useful in the EFL writing classroom.

Structuralism: Grammar, organization, and Ferdinand de Saussure

According to Bressler (2003), structuralists believe that “codes, signs, and rules govern all human social and cultural practices, including communication” (p. 82). With that belief, Culler (1997) points out, structuralism focuses on identifying the underlying structures by which meanings are produced. Structuralism tries to isolate and articulate the organizational relations that underlie observable phenomena (Chow, 2006). In language studies, therefore, structuralists have discovered numerous interlocking structures that govern the use of language. In fact, attempts to find the underlying structures of language date back to the heyday of philology (18th century), a branch of education that “described, compared, and analyzed the languages of the world to discover similarities and relationships” (Bressler, 2003, p. 76). The work of philologists must have brought about the idea that there is a universal structure, often referred to as “the universal grammar,” that all human beings share and that can be investigated in the languages they use. Theorists in the field of Error Analysis also confirm that there is this universal structure hidden in the human brain, called “the latent language structure” (Lenneberg, 1967, as cited in Selinker, 1984, p. 33). Noam Chomsky argues that every healthy child is endowed with the universal grammar, sometimes referred as LAD (Language Acquisition Device) (1986, as cited in Akmajian, Demers, Farmer, & Harnish, 2001). Supposedly, this grammar or device allows children to progress in their mother tongue easily and allows a person to learn a new language with ease.

As many linguists hold that “all human languages can be analyzed as systems consisting of discrete units, with rules for combining those units in various ways” (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer, & Harnish, 2001), comparisons of languages must have uncovered the differences and similarities in sentential and phrasal structures of different languages. This knowledge about similarities, differences, and relationships among discrete units that structuralists have found as a result of trying to find the universal grammar has been useful in classes of grammar, error analysis, translation, applied linguistics, and of course, writing. Based on such knowledge, the Basic Writing course at Srinakharinwirot University, for example, teaches the basic sentence patterns similar to those of the Thai language, such as Subject + Be + Adjective, Subject + Transitive Verb + Direct

Object, and Subject + Linking Verb + Adjective. It is apparently necessary that in an EFL context, where there is not much availability of the target language, students must learn and practice these basic patterns; otherwise, they will produce unrecognizable, hard-to-grasp sentences, such as “Courage is an inspiration to ambitious goals we have set to achieve as well.” In learning the structure “Subject + Be + Subject Complement,” students will also learn that the subject complement must meaningfully refer back to the subject. Thus, equating “inspiration” with “courage” is confusing.

The work of structuralists has brought us useful knowledge for learning and teaching a language. One benefit of structuralism is derived from its emphasis on the sentence (The origins, 2011). There is a hypothesis that sentences are structured with discrete units. This hypothesis leads to three aspects of sentence structure: the linear order of word in a sentence, the categorization of words into parts of speech, and the grouping of words into structural constituents of the sentence (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer, & Harnish, 2001). The knowledge about these three aspects has helped teachers to explain how words of different parts of speech are put together, and also how the different constituents of the sentence are arranged to obtain a meaning. The knowledge about parts of speech of words and functions of constituents is useful in explaining any languages of the world. In fact, the work of structuralists is very detailed, to the extent that we learn that “not” is an adverb and the suffixes—*tion* and—*ness* create nouns. Teachers of grammar, error analysis, and writing can use the knowledge gained from structuralists to help their students.

However, the work of structuralists is not restricted to explaining how words, phrases, clauses, and sentences are created. According to Glazer (1996), structuralism focuses on studying mental models. Thus, at the discourse level, structuralists examine the mental frame that governs how a text is produced. For example, it is believed that there is a mental model, or an underlying structure, that governs how a tale is told, how its meaning is produced. However, stories are not told in the same way; thus, there is a mental model for sad stories, and one for happy ones. For structuralists, thus, it can be argued that all texts—a piece of news, a long novel, a letter to the editor,

for example—have been written out of a mental framework. In our EFL writing classrooms, too, we make our students create mental models. We usually teach the five-paragraph theme to our students. Some teachers may prefer that their students write an outline listing the subtopics that will be discussed in the body. Other teachers may ask their students to write a funnel introduction that starts with general statements about the topic and narrows down to a thesis statement that lists the subtopics (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). By making an outline or writing a thesis statement, students create a framework in their minds that tells them what point to discuss first and what points to come later. With regard to the mental frame of the five paragraph theme, some people might think of Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss philologist, who offers two terms for explaining how language works: *langue* and *parole*. Saussure explains that individual utterances (*paroles*) do not obtain a particular meaning unless they are governed by a system (*langue*) (1959, as cited in Bressler, 2003). The five-paragraph theme is, thus, a structuralist mental model, or a *langue*. This *langue* can be filled by different *paroles* to produce different essays on different topics.

I would argue then that the teaching of EFL writing classroom overuses the work of structuralists. We explain grammar using the knowledge created by structuralists about morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. We analyze students' errors by considering similarities and differences between our native language and English and find ways to help our students to avoid making errors. We ask our students to use the five-paragraph theme to ease our assessment. It is undeniable that most of the knowledge we pass on to our students comes from structuralists.

The teaching in structuralist methodologies, in fact, corresponds to the teaching in current-traditional rhetoric in the field of Composition. Structuralism stresses the memorization and regurgitation of set patterns and is exclusively concerned with grammatical accuracy (Kaplan, 2001). Similarly, current-traditional rhetoric emphasizes correctness, arrangement, and style (Crowley, 1998; Kaewnuch, 2009). It is clear, therefore, that the teaching of EFL writing applies concepts of structuralism and current-traditional rhetoric. Some teachers may apply knowledge from the fields of Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis to

help their students to understand the similarities and differences between two languages, and also the kinds of interferences between them. The knowledge in those fields is grounded in structuralism.

Whatever pedagogies or areas of knowledge are applied in the teaching of EFL writing, the heritage of structuralism and current-traditional rhetoric must have brought about what I call “the traditional rubric.” The rubric that most of us use contains criteria similar to those suggested by Educational Testing Service (ETS) researchers half a century ago. In 1961, Diederich, French, and Carlton of the ETS introduced seven main headings to maintain reliability, which included *ideas, style, organization, paragraphing, sentence structure, mechanics, and verbal facility* (Broad, 2003; Diederich, French, & Carlton, 1961). By nature, the teaching of EFL writing is time-consuming, mostly concerning teaching students how to write grammatically and grading their written texts. Thus, along with many other responsibilities we are assigned by our institutions, apart from teaching, our rubric needs to be brief and precise, containing about four or five criteria, such as *grammar, organization, ideas, content, and sentence ability*. Certainly, we use different criteria, but the ones that our traditional rubric usually has at its core are *grammar* and *organization*.

There are certainly the effects of the way we teach and the traditional rubric we use. The strongest accusation of it is that it oppresses students, that it prevents students from exploring and creating knowledge. One can argue that the teaching makes students too concerned about correctness and organization, and afraid of violating grammatical rules and the organization or genre required. It may be presumed that their writing expresses declarative (what) and procedural (how) rather than conditional (when and why) knowledge, as the research by Negretti and Kuteeva (2011) shows. In other words, their writing tends to be informative rather than critical and analytical. The fact, however, is that writing is recursive and discursive, leading the writer to new ideas or new points about a topic. The writer’s external world should not be reduced to focused consciousness directed to the piece of paper in front of him or her. Sticking to the organization and not risking using complex sentences, students lose the chances to find new ideas or explore the different sides of a topic. To put it another way, they would leave out a lot of information that

would otherwise make them understand the topic they are writing about more clearly. Writing, in this case, cannot be a tool for developing students' critical and analytical thinking, as many known theorists of Composition assert (Emig, 1997). Crowley (1990) views the current-traditional pedagogy as a "theory of graphic display" that fails to help students to develop critical thinking or to consider sociocultural issues involved in the act of writing. Writing taught in the structuralist paradigm, as a result, cannot be a tool for self-discovery, or a tool for developing maturity, a quality strongly encouraged by practitioners of process and expressivist pedagogies.

The structuralist focus on form is found in the current-traditional model of composition instruction. The current-traditional pedagogy emphasizes form over content (Kennedy, 1998). In addition, Yong (1978) points out that current-traditional rhetoric emphasizes the composed product rather than the composing process, and is obsessed with usage. One of the criticisms is that this pedagogy sees the main modes (exposition, description, narration, and argument) of writing as separated from each other, as if one were better than another and as if no combination among them could be made (Crowley, 1990 as cited in Kennedy, 1998). To follow each of the modes successfully, the writer must remember its structure, which is not impossible because the writer is, in this pedagogy, expected to have a clear mind that can "[see] and [understand] a topic and [that] is capable of articulating that vision perfectly in words" (Kennedy, 1998, p. 73). The writer is believed to know perfectly what information to put in each piece of writing. In *Methodical Memory*, Crowley (1990) points out that in this pedagogy the author is believed to be a storehouse "filled with treasures" (p. 174). The writer is expected to be able to choose the treasures (or details) to fill in each piece of writing appropriately. In other words, practitioners of this pedagogy identify with modern thinkers (modernists as opposed to post-modernists) that a person has his or her own transcendental abilities to understand the surroundings and find knowledge by him or herself.

However, while the writer is believed to be very skillful, the reality for the EFL student writer is the opposite. One argument why the EFL student cannot use his or her treasures is that he or she is inexperienced in writing, partly because he or she has passively been receiving knowledge since the

start of his or her student career. Teacher-centeredness keeps dominating the classroom. Another argument is that the EFL student still does not have enough knowledge about English, so he or she needs to learn language skills. This goes back to the argument above that this pedagogy makes students afraid of expressing themselves for fear that they would make errors or break the genre required for the assignment, and as a consequence, they are more or less hindered from thinking critically. According to Huot (2002), the structuralist or current-traditional pedagogy has a punitive and pervasive nature. Grammar is a vast area, and is about almost anything from the use of *a*, *an*, and *the* to the use of noun clauses. When a student uses *a* or *the* wrong, a point may be deducted.

The education of structuralism and current-traditional rhetoric, therefore, seems to be paradoxical for the EFL student. On the one hand, it is the kind of education Freire (2005) calls “banking education,” in which the teacher wants to fill as much knowledge as possible into the student and in which the student passively receives the knowledge. Many people accuse this way of education of oppressing students. On the other hand, we should also consider the advantages of structuralism and current-traditional rhetoric, especially in relation to teaching English as a foreign language. Again, this goes back to some claims above. We have used much grammatical knowledge from structuralism to teach our students to write clear sentences, to identify errors and avoid them, and to produce logical and smooth prose. In my research titled “Reader-Writer Relationships and Codes: Techniques and Strategies in Expressivist Pedagogy,” which surveyed techniques and strategies for empowering writing for Thai students, all four readers confirmed that grammar and organization are two main empowering qualities. In the EFL context, grammar and organization are of utmost importance. Emphases on these two elements may be detrimental to English-speaking students, but for EFL students who produce tons of errors, they are useful.

Poststructuralism: Growth of critical thinking

Known theorists in Composition such as Baxter Magolda (2001) and Berlin (1996) believe that critical and analytical thinking is the main goal of

teaching writing. To put it another way, teachers of composition should indoctrinate consciousness or enlightenment in students. This consciousness does not restrict the writer in a narrow world, a world of himself or herself, but expands his or her worldly knowledge as well as urges him or her to think of the well-being of the society. One's consciousness should lead one to see what is right and what is wrong, and certainly to try to get rid of the latter.

Therefore, the education of writing should not focus on teaching grammar and organization only because that does not expand students' worldly vision sufficiently. Incorporating poststructuralist concepts seems to facilitate the mission of raising students' self-awareness. Poststructuralism may be used synonymously with postmodernism and deconstruction (Bressler, 2003), all of which challenge such long-held beliefs as that a complete meaning can be found in texts, that each culture, custom, or action has its own core structure, that there are unchanging truths for humans to uncover, and that a person is endowed with transcendental abilities to acquire knowledge and understand his or her surroundings. Michel Foucault, first viewed as a structuralist but later as a poststructuralist, disagrees that there are definite underlying structures that can explain human conditions, nor does he agree that those conditions can be explained objectively (as cited in Jones, 2011). Poststructuralism, instead, emphasizes the critique of knowledge and totality (Culler, 1997). To put it differently, poststructuralists dispute the notions that truths are stable, that there are objective realities, and that each human action (how one dresses, how one builds a home, and so on) is governed by a structure. Rather, they believe that “[t]ruth is relative, depending on the nature and variety of cultural and social influences in one's life” (Bressler, 2003, p. 98). Poststructuralists maintain that many, not one, truths exist, and also that meaning keeps changing. Knowledge in the poststructuralist view, therefore, is obtained only through mixing, comparing, and contrasting different discourses. This claim is well-supported by the fact that in this age the world is in the states of randomness, dissolution, ambiguity, cataclysm, and chaos (Faigley, 1992). Through these conditions, knowledge is unstable and keeps changing.

In addition, knowledge in poststructuralism is seen as a collage, or a random collection, of information. According to Bressler (2003), “a collage permits many possible meanings: the viewer (or “reader”) can simply juxtapose a variety of combinations of images, thereby constantly changing the meaning of the collage” (p. 98). Theorists of deconstruction hold a similar notion. Deconstructionism, a concept pioneered by Jacques Derrida, tries to dismantle hierarchical oppositions that govern thoughts such as black/white, presence/absence, and mind/body (Culler, 1997). In the deconstructionist or poststructuralist view, a text is meaningful not by itself, but by other texts. Saussure says that meaning in language is a matter of difference. “Cat” is “cat” because it is not “cap” or “cut”. Deconstructionists and poststructuralists expand that idea. Eagleton (1996) points out that “[i]f every sign is what it is because it is not all the other signs, every sign would seem to be made up of a potential infinite tissue of differences” (p. 110). An immoral action, for instance, is viewed as immoral because people compare it with many, not just one, moral as well as immoral actions. To arrive at a truth about one thing, as a result, one should look at that thing from all directions. A truth, or a collage, then, is a random collection of small pieces of information.

To illustrate how one may look at a text in structuralist and poststructuralist perspectives, read this very short fable.

The lion and the mouse

One day a great lion lay asleep in the sunshine. A little mouse ran across his paw and wakened him. The great lion was just going to eat him up when the little mouse cried, “Oh, please, let me go, sir. Someday I may help you.”

The lion laughed at the thought that the mouse could be of any use to him. But he was a good-natured lion, and he set the mouse free.

Not long after, the lion was caught in a net. He tugged and pulled with all his might, but the ropes were too strong. Then he roared loudly. The little mouse heard him, and ran to the spot.

“Be still, dear Lion, and I will set you free. I will gnaw the ropes.” With his sharp little teeth, the mouse cut the ropes, and the lion came out of the net.

“You laughed at me once,” said the mouse. “You thought I was too little to do you a good turn. But see, you owe your life to a poor little mouse.” (Bennett, 1993, p. 110)

The simple plot or structure of this famous fable, to look at it in the structuralist view, is that the protagonist is portrayed first as poor, troubled, or unskillful, but then this person, at the end of the story, becomes amazingly successful, or becomes useful for others. This plot is widely used. This is clearly evidenced in soap operas in our society. The main character who is born poor but who works hard and fights against obstacles patiently usually becomes successful in the end.

However, without the wrong deeds of others, the protagonist may not be able to draw as much attention, as much sympathy or respect. The other characters, who get less attention, actually help increase the protagonist’s heroism. Poststructuralists look around at all sides. In analyzing a story, poststructuralists consider not just how the main character represents the plot or theme but how the other characters play a part in creating meaning. To go back to the lion and mouse story above, students may be asked with questions such as “Why didn’t the lion eat the mouse?” “How would you feel if the lion ate the mouse?” “What if the mouse didn’t go back to help the lion?” and “What if we do not have the kind of the mouse’s honesty in our society?” Looking at a text from all sides, which poststructuralists do, therefore, can help learners to identify what exactly is meant by the writer, especially when the text is complex. This applies to all kinds of texts. A text can also be juxtaposed with other texts so that the topic or issue in focus is highlighted through the comparison and/or contrast of ideas within them. The byproduct of teaching using poststructuralist methodologies is certainly the quality that theorists in Composition hope for, critical thinking.

How can we combine structuralism and poststructuralism in writing assessment?

From the discussion above, we understand that structuralism and poststructuralism have both merits and demerits if applied in the EFL writing classroom. EFL students need the language for expressing themselves and

organizational patterns for writing effectively. If taught in the poststructuralist paradigm without any emphasis on language competence, it is unlikely that they can produce effective prose. However, while learning to write, they should also have opportunities to develop desirable human qualities such as being critical, moral, and knowledgeable. Therefore, there should be a combination of the concepts and methods of these theories to improve the teaching and learning of EFL writing. Below, I insist once again not just that the structuralist method is indispensable in the EFL writing classroom, but also that the incorporation of the poststructuralist method is as much important. Therefore, a new approach to teaching writing, even in a basic writing course, that I want to offer is that we divide the writing course into two parts: Part I is grammar and organization, and Part II is knowledge.

Why structuralism is necessary is mostly because our students produce a lot of errors. Even fourth-year English majors still produce a huge number of them, such as “*Students are lack of attention studying,” “*Alcohol drinking is dangerous that it causes of many awful things,” and “*They can help their parents that they get to working.” These examples show that teaching students about parts of speech, sentence patterns, modifiers, and also how clauses are combined, is indispensable. Our students also produce numerous un-English or severe errors incomprehensible to native speakers such as “*I will love you increase and increase,” and “*For make give you happy, I will to do this job.” These examples are from two of my university students. They are certainly the convincing support for why we need to teach grammar.

Apart from teaching our students how to write grammatically and in recognizable sentence patterns, we also need to teach them to be careful about the meaning of their sentences. While for the most part inability in grammar or structure results in inability to write clearly, students must also be constantly instructed to be careful about the logic of their writing. The excerpt below clearly shows both how grammatical inability obstructs comprehension and how poor logic might weaken the student’s writing.

In my opinion, the student should work the part-time jobs for four reasons. First of all they can help their parents from money that they get to working. And they can help their parents to save their money. Second, the part-time jobs make them be good people. Because they don't use their freetime in a bad way. Consequently, they are the good people and the hope of their family.

Obviously, the second sentence delays the reader's meaning processing due to wrong use of two prepositions; the sentence would be clear if the preposition "from" is changed to "with" and the preposition "to" to "from." Also, the second reason given is not logical. It does not sound right to claim that a person can become a good person, a respectable one, if he or she works part-time. Rather, people are considered good because of their behavior. It is wrong to say that by working part-time a person becomes good. Note at this point that for many EFL students emphasis on superficial organizational features, such as the use of transitional words and expressions, reduces their attention to the logic of their writing. Logic or meaning, however, is the true reason why people write. Form is in fact subordinate to meaning. Teachers, therefore, should check both organizational features and logic. Accepting that logic is important means agreeing that the writer has transcendental abilities in acquiring knowledge and making meaning.

Organization is certainly one important contribution of structuralism. A quick survey of rubrics and research reports would reveal that organization is one major criterion for good writing. There were 53 "educated and intelligent" readers participating in the ETS research led by Diederich mentioned above who pointed out that good organization empowered writing (Broad, 2003). Researchers across cultures such as Sasaki and Hirose (1996) also state that organization is a major component of powerful writing. Without doing research, we too find that our students need to be good at organizing their writing. We often find that they do not focus on a main point or stray from the topic sentence. Writing a paragraph about trust, for example, a student may include details about friendship and reliance, thus spoiling the unity of the paragraph. Students should be taught to exclude irrelevant details.

My pedagogical project, however, is a combination of structuralist and poststructuralist methodologies. Most teachers should continue teaching grammar and organization (structuralist method) as I explained above. In fact, in a basic writing classroom up to 70 percent of the time should be spent teaching grammar and organization. Another 30 percent of the time should be spent teaching knowledge (poststructuralist method). Knowledge can even refer to the growth in vocabulary, and this growth should be taken as gradual and life-long. In structuralism, the writer is believed to be the center of the discourse, possessing transcendental abilities. Thus, students are asked to write out of their own narrow worlds, out of their heads only, on such easy topics as “My father” and “Why I like English.” This may not allow them to acquire as much vocabulary as they should.

In poststructuralism, on the other hand, students have many channels to acquire vocabulary. Poststructuralist teachers may use movies, songs, advertisements, television, photos, leaflets, and so on in their teaching. These materials help students not only to expand their vocabulary but also to acquire basic literacy skills and content knowledge, which I believe to be essential for EFL students. Teachers can choose to focus on a specific area, such as Thai customs, festivals, forest preservation, the distinction of elephants, and agriculturists in the modern age. In fact, recent research such as Franquiz and Salinas (2011) and Short and Fitzsimmons (2006) reveals subject-area instruction helps students to be more engaged in the production of writing; it tempts students to express their voices and try to understand multiple perspectives as well as conflicting information. Students of a basic writing course can read easy texts as sources of their writing. This will give them opportunities to absorb not only sentence structures but also vocabulary. It would be a double challenge that EFL teachers teach both language competence or literacy skills (structuralism), and content knowledge (poststructuralism) simultaneously.

Knowledge, however, refers more to the understanding about the outside world than to a bigger vocabulary size. In the poststructuralist perspective, everything is part of knowledge, and small pieces of information put together can lead to a better understanding of something. Thus, for example, the focus in the story “Jack and the Beanstalk” is not on Jack’s heroic actions but on

the concept of heroism. To adopt a poststructuralist methodology for students to dig into this concept, a teacher may lead them by asking questions such as “In what ways do you think Jack should not be considered a hero?” “What are Jack’s other characteristics that tarnish his heroism?” and “How does Jack’s bravery differ from your understanding of bravery?” The teacher may then ask the students to sit together and try to answer the questions. Their cooperation will finally lead to putting small pieces of information (answers) together, thereby creating new perspectives about the term heroism. The teacher may also ask his or her students to compare Jack with other characters in other stories in relation to heroism. Again this can be done collaboratively. Coming to this point, I want to point out that collaborative learning, which is apparently a poststructuralist methodology, is strongly encouraged by many famed theorists in Composition such as Bruffee (1993) and Elbow (1990).

Structuralism views things as binary or hierarchical, but we need to be creative in our teaching. People often unconsciously think of things in oppositions. For example, in a soap opera one character may be thought to be good and another to be bad. These two characters act so prominently that the audience pays less attention to the other characters. This way of thinking is often applied in a writing course. The structuralist teacher often asks the student to write about why something is good and why something is not. In other words, the writing of students is often based on two binary oppositions. This way of seeing things seems to be fostered in lower writing classes, where the purpose seems to be only that students can choose details to support a point logically. It seems to me that we teach students to grow corn to get corn, not other things. We hardly teach them that if a condition changes, for example, when there is a big storm, corn can become wheat. Students need to be taught to be creative. A death almost always means to our students the end of a life. They hardly think that death is an entity that can creep in and out of a person’s body depending on the person’s health. In this way we look at death as a concrete object. Poststructuralists, however, teach us to be creative and to consider all sides of a topic, and one of techniques is by asking such questions as those about Jack and the beanstalk above. Thus, instead of writing why a character in a story is good and why another is not, students may write

about what will happen if the two characters become very good friends. I argue that in this way our students' writing will become a lot more interesting. We can still emphasize grammar and organization, but the contents of our students' writing will be more interesting. More importantly, we will be to help our students not only to develop their critical thinking skills but also to expand their own knowledge.

There are many techniques to apply poststructuralism. Teachers should use not just a writing book or an exercise book. They can use, as mentioned above, maps, newspapers, sketches, telegrams, and so on. Teachers can ask their students to do a word study of relevant vocabulary on the chosen topic. They can read many sources and list useful words for their writing. Teachers may ask them to write responses or reflections on the topic or to do on-site writing activities. Students can have group discussions. Poststructuralist teaching is very creative. To give a specific example, after the students and the teacher agree that a character in a soap opera is very good, the students may be asked to use a table in which the students list opposite actions to those committed by the good character. This may seem to be binary, structuralist-like. However, the collaboration among the students and the writing, for example, writing about the character's twin living elsewhere who acts badly, are a poststructuralist methodology. In structuralism, students are asked to study and discuss whatever is available in front of them. In poststructuralism or deconstructionism, students are asked to consider things that are missing, e.g. from a text. As a result, their writing becomes more creative and interesting. In one aspect, structuralism is involved with seeing the writer as the center of the world (Chow, 2006). Thus, any activities that expand the writer, that encourage him or her to use different sources, may be said to be poststructuralism.

After thinking about how we might combine structuralism and poststructuralism, we should rethink our assessment of our students' writing. The assessment should reflect the combination of structuralism and poststructuralism. The rubric can be very simple, containing just a few criteria; it may include *grammar* (3 points), *organization* (3 points), *content* (3 points), and *draft development* (1 point). Grammar and organization are structuralism, while

content is poststructuralism. It may be difficult to state what is included in content; most teachers probably consider whether the details are logical and support the topic sentences, and whether the student is fluent. Gearing content toward poststructuralism is possible though. Teachers can look for ideas that reflect critical thinking, that show that the student has spent considerable time thinking about the topic. For example, when writing about Jack and the beanstalk, a student may say that while young children are taught that bravery is a good quality, they should also be taught not to overlook other necessary qualities. Or the student may say that Jack's bravery overshadows other desirable qualities. These show that the student has thought critically about the meaning of bravery. Any teachers should admire him or her.

Finally, there are many ways to improve EFL students' writing. In one course, we may focus on eliciting students' voice and agency. In another course, we may want to highlight students' awareness of rhetorical situations. However, I think that the combination of structuralist and poststructuralist methodologies, where our EFL students can develop their language skills along with enhancing their worldly knowledge and inculcating good human qualities in themselves is the most important.

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