



The International Research Foundation
for English Language Education

Title of Project:

The Role of Cognitive Complexity of Independent Writing Tasks in L2 Writing Quality and in Accuracy, Complexity, and Fluency of Language Production in L2 writing

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Project Overview:

Drawing on the writing literature and the task-based language literature, this project examines the effect of cognitive complexity of independent writing tasks on L2 writing quality and on accuracy, complexity, and fluency of language production in L2 writing, as well as the predictive power of the language features on L2 writing performance. The cognitive complexity factors studied are rhetorical task (narrative, expository, and argumentative tasks) and topic familiarity (personal, impersonal-familiar, and impersonal-less familiar topics). Six writing prompts with the same subject matter of use of computers and the Internet are to be used to test the effects of the two cognitive complexity factors. 360 college-level EFL learners will be recruited from a medium-ranking public university in China, with each participant writing one timed essay and 60 participants writing essays on one writing prompt. The participants will also be tested on their general language proficiency with a validated cloze test. All the essays will be rated on a holistic scale and on a scale for task fulfillment by two trained raters. Each essay will also be analyzed in terms of its linguistic accuracy, lexical complexity, syntactic complexity, and essay length. ANCOVA will be performed to study the effect of the two cognitive complexity factors on L2 writing quality and on linguistic accuracy, complexity, and fluency of L2 writing. Multiple regression will be performed to study the predictive power of the language features on L2 writing quality for tasks of different cognitive complexity. The project will have implications for L2 writing assessment.