



## Case studies

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# CONDUCTING GENRE-BASED RESEARCH IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

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## A Methodological Guide

*Edited by*  
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## Chapter 2

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### CASE STUDIES

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# 2

## CASE STUDIES

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### 2.1 Introduction to the approach and definition of *genre*

The use of case studies in the social sciences and specifically in second language teaching has reflected the social turn in the field and the shift in the theoretical framework from focusing on cognition to identity theories and socialization. This acknowledgment of individual differences and reluctance to view learners as masses encouraged the use of case studies among multilingual writers (Polio & Friedman, 2016). The purpose of a case study is to investigate in all its complexity a specific singular case or multiple cases under a certain set of typical or atypical circumstances. In genre research, case studies have been applied primarily to study how single students or groups of students learn to produce a genre under specific circumstances and/or over time (e.g., Casanave, 2010; Kessler, 2021; Tardy, 2005), or to study the learning generated by genre-based approaches to teaching, such as explicit instruction (e.g., Huang, 2014) and use of genre-based materials in subject teaching (e.g., De Oliveira & Lan, 2014). More rarely, the case has been the genre itself, with the aim of documenting the process that leads to its production (e.g., McGrath, 2016).

What characterizes then a case study approach? Because case studies are a well-established methodology beyond genre research, we start first with some general considerations about this methodological approach. The key characteristic defining an inquiry as a case study is the focus on a case, delineated by clear boundaries – its “casing” (Ragin & Becker, 1992, p. 217). The underlying assumption is that the case, and the specific circumstances in which it is examined, can provide in-depth insights that have the potential to apply to similar sets of cases and circumstances, or alternatively

provide an answer to a specific question. In simple terms, we could say that a case study is an *example* of some sort, *from which we can learn* something. Therefore, case studies can illustrate how a theory may apply to real situations, and conversely how lived experiences and authentic situations may problematize and add complexity to theoretical assumptions.

Therefore, the delimitation of the case is an important starting point in case studies: a clear description of the unit of study and its specific characteristics, *as well as* a clear description of the circumstances under which it is studied which make it interesting to investigate (Yin, 2009). That said, there are two main approaches to case studies in research which correspond to different views about research paradigms. In the interpretive/social constructivist paradigm (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995), there is often a personal interaction (transaction) between the researcher, often the teacher, and the case (e.g., Huang, 2014); whereas in a post-positivist paradigm (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Yin, 2003, 2009), the case is studied through a clearly defined initial protocol where all the characteristics of the case are described and possibly even measured (e.g., McGrath, 2016). Nevertheless, case studies are versatile in nature and entail collecting a variety of evidence, often over time, that results in a rich and complex collection of data about the case (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

In genre research, case studies have been used primarily to investigate how individual or small clusters of students develop genre knowledge and learn to write (e.g., Cheng, 2008; Guo, 2019; Kessler, 2021; Negretti & Kuteeva, 2011; Wang, 2020), what impact different pedagogies and teacher practices have (e.g., Huang, 2014; Troyan, 2016), and how specific genres are produced, including co-authoring processes and language practices, both L1 and L2 (e.g., Flowerdew & Wan, 2010; McGrath, 2016; Townley & Jones, 2016). Genre, in these studies, is usually defined fluidly as a communicative event which a social group recognizes as typical for a situation, with a typical purpose, and which therefore often presents a set of discursive and linguistic features that are more or less conventional (Miller, 1984).

In general, the definition of the case and the focus of the study – its specific circumstances – are influenced by the tradition of genre-based research that the researchers align themselves with. Studies with a focus on genre learning, especially in L2, have fallen under the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) umbrella (Swales, 1990), which places particular focus on rhetorical characteristics of genres and the language that characterizes typical rhetorical moves and their variation (see for example Cheng, 2008). Case studies of texts as examples of genre – which fall under genre analysis – also adopt an ESP/LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) lens (e.g., Townley & Jones, 2016). Case studies with a focus on classroom practice

sometimes adopt Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theories (Martin, 1992; see also Pessoa et al., 2017) where genres tend to be described based on discourse functions. Case studies that explore literacy practices and social identity are likely to be inspired by academic literacy theories – AcLits (Lillis & Harrington, 2015; Lillis & Scott, 2007), which aim to study academic writing development in its sociohistorical context, with special attention to imbalances of power and narratives of dominance surrounding L2 writers (e.g., Casanave, 2003; Harwood & Petrić, 2017).

## 2.2 Goals

In terms of goals, in broad terms case studies in genre research aim to understand the development of genre knowledge (Tardy et al., 2020) as well as the social and individual circumstances that contribute to this development (e.g., Casanave, 2010; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013). As such, case studies are used to investigate research questions such as:

- How do different learners develop an increasingly sophisticated genre knowledge over time, across genres, and/or languages?
- How do different learners develop knowledge of the same academic or professional genre over time, given the same context?
- What is the impact of a genre-based instructional approach on a student's or a classroom's development of writing skills?
- How do learners approach similar genres in different languages? Does transfer of genre knowledge occur in these cases?
- How does a teacher use genre-based pedagogy in their practice and why? (with possible extensions to the impact on students' learning)
- How do sociohistorical and contextual circumstances affect the lived experience of a writer(s) in the production of a genre?
- What are the social and collaborative activities that lead to the production of a specific genre? (With a specific text/genre example as a case.)

## 2.3 Common research methods

Case study research is not confined to one type of data collection method (e.g., interviews, observations, writing logs, think-alouds), but the researcher has the flexibility to adopt various qualitative and quantitative approaches, as long as there is richness in the data, (i.e., data is collected either from various resources, for a period of time, and/or on various stages in the process). As clearly put by Flyvbjerg (2011), “If you choose to do a case study, you are therefore not so much making a methodological choice as a choice of what it is to be studied [and why]” (p. 301).

We make a distinction here between the use of case studies as a method and as a methodology (drawing on Lillis', 2008 distinction on the use of ethnography as a method, methodology, and deep theorizing). Case studies are used as a method when a single method is used in data collection and analysis (e.g., McGrath, 2016) and as a methodology when several methods are used, such as interviews, text histories, questionnaires, and observations to study a case.

A useful starting point to think about case study methods in genre research, especially in relation to writing, is Casanave's (2003) distinction of cases as either a) written products (e.g., McGrath, 2016); b) writing processes (De Oliveira & Lan, 2014), and c) writer (or teacher) identity (e.g., Tardy, 2005). This distinction can highlight the description and delimitation of the case that is adopted in different studies which is often influenced by the genre theories that researchers ascribe to, and may help in understanding the motivation behind specific data collection methods used in the case study. Thus, what distinguishes case study research from other methodological approaches, especially in genre research, is the focus of the study on a specific case (which might be a person, a text, a process of production, or a method of instruction), and the approach to the interpretation of the evidence where, for example, researchers might consider avoiding bias in data analysis by adopting triangulation.

Triangulation of methods of data collection and/or analysis is an important procedure in case studies, since it provides confirmation of findings which increases data trustworthiness and provides additional perspectives about the case, resulting in a better understanding of complex phenomena (e.g., De Oliveira & Lan, 2014). Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identified four types of triangulation: (a) method triangulation, where several methods can be used to either ensure the trustworthiness of data or to collect more information (e.g., using textual analysis of drafts as well as interviews); (b) investigator triangulation, where more than one researcher is involved in the research process as a whole (e.g., agreeing on theories used, data collection methods, independent data analysis); (c) theory triangulation, via using different theories to interpret the same data set (e.g., combining genre theory and identity theory, as in our example study); and (d) data source triangulation, via using the same method to collect data from various sources (e.g., interviewing all co-authors involved in one text). As has been pointed out earlier, case studies do not fall under the umbrella of a specific research paradigm. Rather, case studies can be considered as a bridge between various paradigms (Luck et al., 2006) where one does not have to use the traditional methodological, ontological, and epistemological divides but can move freely on the paradigms' continuum or use a mix of paradigms.

Nevertheless, case studies, especially in genre studies, have typically been associated with post-positivist, constructivist, critical, and interpretive methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) limiting the focus to understanding social and contextual dynamics that surround a case, by adopting primarily qualitative approaches to data collection, and missing on the opportunity to investigate cases as larger entities. For example, instead of focusing mainly on a person or a text in genre studies, researchers might seek to widen their case and focus on the impact of learning a genre on the ranking of an educational institute by making the institute the case. Some of the data collection methods that are used in case study research, for instance, interviews of different types and observations, are also common in other approaches such as ethnography (see Tardy, this volume), especially when the focus of the investigation is the experience of learners. Having said that, case studies are versatile in nature and can include “a palette of methods” (Stake, 1995, pp. xi–xii), or one single method of data collection used systematically.

Case studies can also be used as a part of a larger study, where a specific case is studied in depth, opening the space for answering research questions about the larger context (e.g., De Oliveira & Lan, 2014). Another possibility to approach a case study is by using a multiple case study design, which is a newer trend to track issues of typicality and variation (Duff & Anderson, 2016). There are two ways to use the multiple case study: either by looking for differences and/or similarities via cross-case analysis and aiming for generalizability, thus, adopting a positivistic approach (Yin, 2003). This can be done, for example, by investigating the impact of genre analysis instruction on less and more successful writers. The second option to use a multiple case study design is to understand the phenomenon through the experiences of multiple cases – hence, similarities and differences are not accounted for (Stake, 1995). It should be noted that in longitudinal multiple case studies, not all the cases necessarily last the same length of time (e.g., one and two years in the two cases in Tardy, 2005). Additionally, participants do not even have to share the same profile: Tardy’s participants were one PhD and one master’s student in two different disciplines. Regardless of how the case study is incorporated (e.g., single case study, multiple case study, single case study as part of a larger study), data collection might last for a varied amount of time depending on the focus of the study, for example, at the end of the course (e.g., Huang, 2014) or be retrospective in nature by collecting drafts of a text (e.g., McGrath, 2016).

As can be seen, designing a case study requires a careful design and well-motivated choices. Hence, researchers’ reflexivity, where researchers acknowledge their role in the research process and critically reflect on the various phases of the research design and interpretation, is highly recommended in case studies. We suggest the following exercise, which is presented in Table 2.1

TABLE 2.1 Case study design: reflective exercise

<i>Theoretical Basis + RQs</i>	<i>Study Design</i>	<i>Methods of Data Collection and Analysis</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What theories underpin my study?</li><li>• Which specific concepts will be tested/examined in the case study?</li><li>• Why is a case study the approach of choice in relation to these theories/concepts?</li><li>• What can be learned from this case or cases? Is it an application or real-world example of a specific theory or concept? If so, what is the specific question that the case study may answer?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why is this specific case worthy of studying?</li><li>• What will I focus on as a case? (e.g., a specific genre and its production; a process of learning, teaching practices, social dimension of genre such as situated or individual practices)</li><li>• What will delimit my case, and what makes it typical/atypical to other cases in the same context?</li><li>• Which relevant details do I need to include about my case in order to describe it sufficiently in relation to the research question (e.g., age, first language etc.)?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Which methods are best suited to collect data that can answer my RQs?</li><li>• Does the case motivate unique types of data collection methods? Which and why?</li><li>• Will data collection be continuous timed? What motivates this timeline?</li><li>• What will be the role of the researcher in the case study? What advantages, disadvantages, and ethical implications does this role entail?</li><li>• Would a single or a multiple case study design be more suitable to answer the RQs?</li></ul>

2.4 Example studies

To better illustrate how case studies have been conducted in genre research, in this section we present a selection of relevant studies that offer a variety of useful examples (see Table 2.2). The studies below show what we think are useful examples in genre analysis on the use of case study as a method, via using a single method (here textual analysis) (i.e., McGrath, 2016), multiple case study design (i.e., Tardy, 2005), reflexivity in conducting case studies (i.e., Casanave, 2010), the researcher as a teacher providing interventions (i.e., Huang, 2014), conducting trustworthiness checks in case studies (i.e., De Oliveira & Lan, 2014), and various levels of reporting a case study (i.e., Kessler, 2021). Importantly, these studies also highlight a myriad of data that researchers might opt to collect, depending on the focus of their study.



TABLE 2.2 Example studies using case study design

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Research Questions (RQs)</i>	<i>Data Collected</i>	<i>Comments on Study Design</i>
Casanave (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The cases are three PhD students writing in a new genre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did three PhD students learn how to write in a new genre in a context that does not support this genre?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email interviews for two years; the researcher's reflective memos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researcher was participants' supervisor</li> <li>Genre defined loosely as writing a qualitative dissertation</li> <li>Important reflections on the positioning of the researcher as the teacher</li> </ul>
De Oliveira and Lan (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The case is an L2 student in an elementary school developing his science writing during a genre-based course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did a science teacher use genre-based materials in her teaching?</li> <li>How did the teacher interact with the students?</li> <li>How does the focal case develop his writing during the course?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class observations; drafts of texts produced before and after instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The study uses SFL</li> <li>The case is representative of the class</li> <li>Explaining the background of the researcher who conducted inter-rater reliability checks</li> </ul>

*(Continued)*

TABLE 2.2 Continued

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Research Questions (RQs)</i>	<i>Data Collected</i>	<i>Comments on Study Design</i>
Huang (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The case is a student in a genre-based writing course for publication</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the impact of explicit teaching on genre knowledge?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pre- and post-course interviews; class interactions; text drafts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Capturing development in genre knowledge over time via data triangulation</li><li>• Presentation of rich interview and textual data throughout the text</li></ul>
Kessler (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The cases are six L2 English learners in a Master of Laws program learning to write a professional legal genre (the office memo) over a 15-week period</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To what extent do the case study participants develop genre awareness of the office memo over a semester? In which area(s) does that awareness develop?</li><li>• To what extent are there variations in students' individual trajectories in terms of developing genre awareness?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Background questionnaire; office memos; three semi-structured interviews and two modified stimulated recalls</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focusing on a professional genre using metacognition theory</li></ul>

McGrath (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The case is a research blog in pure mathematics</li> <li>• Does the study of a collaborative research blog shed light on behind-the-scenes activities pertaining to writing for publication in pure mathematics, and the research article genre?</li> <li>• How did two students develop their rhetorical knowledge over time?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 659 comments posted in response to five blog entries</li> <li>• The blog has comments from non-experts, whose input are rarely investigated in literature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing on the process of producing a genre</li> <li>• The blog has comments from non-experts, whose input are rarely investigated in literature</li> </ul>
Tardy (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The cases are one master's and one PhD student writing in various genres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews; text drafts of various genres; supervisors' feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple case study design</li> <li>• Uses ACL as its framework</li> </ul>

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One way to make use of case studies is to uncover behind-the-scenes processes regarding how genres are written. For example, McGrath (2016), in an exploratory case study, investigated how writing a research article was negotiated via an open-access research blog in pure mathematics, making the focal case a single research blog. The dataset consisted of 659 thread comments in response to five blog posts by expert and non-expert blog users who took part in the discussions. Tracking the comments over five blog posts reflects part of the article writing process in pure mathematics where the creation of knowledge is often a public endeavor. The use of a case study allowed McGrath to provide a detailed explanation regarding how decisions about genre writing are made; these decisions are rarely explicitly discussed. McGrath analyzed the data both inductively and deductively, allowing for the use of previous research as well as for any emerging themes and she ensured data trustworthiness by conducting researcher triangulation where part of the data was analyzed independently by another researcher and agreement was reached among both researchers.

These findings provide valuable insights into genre teaching. For example, one of the comments on the collaborative blog was how students rarely have the chance to peek at how negotiations happen. Thus, McGrath encourages students to take part and observe such blogs. As for differentiating her study from other ethnographic and ethnographically oriented studies, McGrath duly reports how her study is not actually longitudinal and does not track a text history over the whole publication period, but rather, taps into part of the revision process using comments from a blog. This shows the flexibility of the case study design which allowed the researcher to give contextual insights but with limited data.

While McGrath (2016) used a single case study as a method, Tardy (2005) used a multiple case study as a methodology by focusing on two students. Tardy investigated rhetorical knowledge development in advanced literacy by collecting interviews and text drafts of various writing genres: while for one participant this included assignments, homework, job applications, and reviews, the other participant was only involved in academic writing genres such as academic proposals and conference papers. The excellent use of multiple case study design allowed Tardy (2005) to draw on differences and similarities between the cases to answer a question about how two students developed their rhetorical knowledge. Similar to the other reviewed studies in this chapter, Tardy provided detailed information about the participants. However, she uses the AcLits framework, which stresses the importance of the sociocultural background of learners. She provides a full picture not only of both participants' rhetorical background knowledge but also of their aspirations and perspectives on the importance of writing to achieve their future goals. This essential information makes tracking

changes in both students' conceptual as well as textual development more feasible for the reader. Tardy reports how views on writing changed from providing the reader with information (i.e., knowledge telling), to selling ideas to the reader (i.e., knowledge transformation). The findings highlight the importance of mentoring relationships in developing genre knowledge.

This finding is echoed in Casanave (2010), who examined how three female PhD students wrote their qualitative-research dissertations in a department that promotes quantitative research. Casanave investigated learning a genre under specific circumstances and used the cases to highlight the dimension of change in a multiple case study design. The study provides a detailed description of the three cases, covering gender, age, and similarities and differences across cases in relation to their academic writing and English language experiences. Casanave also provides information on her relationship with the participants, the amount of interaction they had, and the reason for being part of the study, which makes this study notable in that it illustrates the importance of reflexivity in data collection and analysis. This study also shows the wide range of data collection methods that researchers can use when they have a specific relationship with the participants. Data collection included email interviews and consultations with the participants over two years. This was supplemented by the researcher's own reflective memos, written after reading and interacting with the three participants.

Rather than following a specific framework or model of genre analysis, this article provides perspectives on deductive methods for conducting genre analysis, which might be relevant for researchers working with emerging genres. Casanave's reflections toward the end on her positioning as a mentor and how this impacted her teaching practices, enhances how we think about case study design and the conclusions that could be drawn from it. We also see some reflections on how taking part in the study changed the participants' perspectives on writing and sensitized them toward their writing processes.

Similar to Casanave, Huang (2014) was also the participant's teacher. Huang investigated how explicit instruction during a 12-week genre-based writing course impacted a Taiwanese PhD student's genre knowledge. The researcher provides a detailed explanation of the case: the participant's motivation to learn about writing, discipline, and previous writing experiences in terms of both process and product. The data included the student's oral interaction data and the multiple drafts of a text intended for publication. Data were analyzed using Tardy's (2009) model of genre knowledge: formal, process, rhetorical, and subject-matter knowledge. The researcher, an outsider to the participant's discipline, was unable to capture the subject-matter knowledge development.

The findings show that the student's genre knowledge developed in relation to formal (linguistic and structural features of a genre), process (the composing process in which a genre is undertaken), and rhetorical (language use that helps writers achieve their intended purposes) aspects of writing for publication due to explicit instruction. The researcher reflects on how the duration of the course impacted the quality of development. This study sets an excellent example of data presentation in a case study, where Huang successfully shows the richness of the data collected by providing clear and concise examples.

As explained earlier, case studies can be part of a larger study. De Oliveira and Lan (2014) is an example of this. Their study aimed to identify instructional practices for teaching upper elementary L2 English learners to write school-based genres. The study's research questions focused on three issues: the implementation of genre-based pedagogy by a science teacher, the teacher's interactions with the students, and the writing development of one student (the main case) as a result of this interaction. De Oliveira and Lan used a case study design to answer the question related to how a typical student in the classroom develops his writing in a course that uses genre-based pedagogy informed by SFL, focusing on one L2 writer. This L2 writer is reported to be representative of the classroom. Researchers identified him as typical based on the science teacher's views about the participant's struggles and challenges during L2 writing.

The researchers in this study report in detail how they ensured accountability, a trustworthiness criterion, of their findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by conducting intercoder reliability checks and asking another researcher familiar with SFL to independently code parts of the interview data. Findings show that the focal participant's L2 writing developed in specific areas relevant to the teaching he was exposed to, for example, the incorporation of more appropriate lexical-grammatical words such as discipline-specific vocabulary.

The last example we provide is Kessler (2021). Kessler investigated how six Masters of Law students developed awareness of a genre collectively and individually by examining the development of two cases during a 15-week course that focused on teaching a professional legal genre (the office memo). In this study, Kessler responded to an overall call for using metacognition theory, which is learners' conscious awareness of three types of knowledge: declarative knowledge (what we know); procedural knowledge (how to apply what we know); and conditional knowledge (the reason the knowledge is relevant to the current learning situation) (see Negretti & McGrath, 2018). Kessler used a background questionnaire, office memos, three semi-structured interviews, and two modified stimulated recalls. Thus, data were triangulated using several research methods.

The findings of this study show that the development of the various types of metacognition knowledge varied across participants. A closer look at two cases showed that these differences are highly related to previous learning experiences; that is, although both cases did not have prior knowledge of the office memo genre, one of them was mainly trained in writing for tests, while the other participant's work as a research assistant exposed him to various law genres and he was able to transfer that knowledge to the office memo genre.

## 2.5 Issues and challenges

In this section, we address three prevalent issues in the studies we reviewed: alignment of citations with the study design, the relationship of the case to its context, and the lack of or minimal discussion of reflexivity. When conducting case studies, researchers often face several issues. The first issue regards the fact that some of the case studies we described earlier cite case study approaches that do not reflect the method taken in the study, specifically in relation to when in the research process the research question(s) are determined. For example, McGrath (2016) cited Stake (2008), whereas her research question is predetermined, thus, a reference to Yin (2003) would have been more appropriate. This issue seems to emerge also in ethnographic studies: for example, Lillis and Curry (2018) cite references to case studies but refer to their methods as ethnography. Additionally, in some of the articles we listed, case study citations are missing entirely, although the authors quite clearly and explicitly adopt a case study approach. Several of the studies presented above do not include any reference to case study (e.g., Tardy, 2005), and some researchers might go as far as not even dedicating a methods section in their report of a case study (e.g., Casanave, 2010). Our recommendation is thus for researchers aiming to embark on a case study to clearly connect their approach to the methodology literature available and clearly motivate their choices (see the "Study in-focus" in the next section).

Secondly, another less prevalent concern in some studies is the relation of the case to its context. In other words, a detailed description of what is common and what is particular about the case seems to be missing (e.g., Huang, 2014). To avoid that, a full description of the case and whether it is an exemplar or outlier should be explicitly provided: this means for example including details about what makes the selected case unique in any way, or on the other hand if the case is a typical example of what could be expected in the context of the study, for example, teachers are often able to identify what a typical struggling student in their class would be (e.g., Huang, 2014). Clearly stating the reasons for choosing a case is important, since contextual boundaries and additional relevant contextual information

(physical, political, geographic) offer a comprehensive understanding of the conditions surrounding the case.

Another potential issue is the lack of or minimal discussion of reflexivity in case study publications. Explicitly articulating the rationale for the case study design, including interpretation (see Table 2.1) and reflecting on the researcher's positioning in relation to the participants, would strengthen the research. For example, Huang (2014) reflected on the fact that he was an outsider to the focal discipline (as we reported earlier); however, we know little about how being the participant's teacher impacted data collection and analysis, such as the power relation between the researcher and the participant. Information on researchers' positioning and relation to the case improves our understanding of the data collection and analysis procedures and how researchers obtained access to the case (e.g., Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013).

In relation to data collection, reflexivity means questioning and weighing carefully each methodological choice (Khuder & Petrić, 2021): is the sampling conducted out of convenience or purpose? For example, Huang's sampling was a convenience sampling. Khuder and Petrić (2021) encourage researchers to adopt methods that include close engagement with the participants to conduct a high level of reflexivity that involves both reflexivity on the research process as well as the product (i.e., the research text produced and its wording). This reflexivity work ensures the trustworthiness of the research process. For instance, even though De Oliveira and Lan (2014) conducted trustworthiness checks to some level, given the nature of their data, a higher level of trustworthiness would have been achieved had the authors explained why they chose a specific case and specific methods of data collection. As an entry point to reflexivity, we recommend our exercise in Table 2.1.

## 2.6 Study in-focus

As an exemplary study, we chose Kobayashi and Rinnert (2013), which tracks the writing development of a multilingual writer (the case) longitudinally. What makes this study stand out is the exemplary way in which the case study methodology is used to illuminate existing theories on multilingual transfer, genre knowledge, and identity, as well as the originality and variety of the methods used for data collection and analysis. The development of linguistic competence across different languages in bi- and multilingual speakers has become increasingly relevant in applied linguistics after the bilingual turn (see Ortega & Carson, 2010) in the study of second language acquisition, posing that a multicompetence perspective, rather than a contrastive/deficit perspective, could better serve the study



of how people develop abilities in more than one language. Specifically in writing, theories and research have strongly suggested that writing competence comprises several components always in development, including genre knowledge (Tardy, 2009), which cut across and are transferred across languages. Multicompetence theory, as adopted in this study, thus describes the development of writing skills in multilinguals as dynamic and fluid, changing with experiences, with soft boundaries across languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011). In addition to multicompetence theory, Kobayashi and Rinnert (2013) use theories of genre as social practice and identity to provide a comprehensive view of how the development of writing competence occurs over time in the three languages used by their multilingual participant, Natsu. Before proceeding further with our commentary, we urge the reader to review Rinnert and Kobayashi's study in the call-out box.

### **Citation**

Kobayashi, H., & Rinnert, C. (2013). L1/L2/L3 writing development: Longitudinal case study of a Japanese multicompetent writer. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 22(1), 4–33.

### **Research questions**

- How do L1 and L2 writing by a multicompetent writer change over two and a half years in terms of linguistic development (fluency, sentence length, and lexical diversity) and text construction (choices of text features)?
- What similarities and differences are there in the multicompetent writer's text construction and composing processes across L1, L2, and L3?
- How are individual and social factors, particularly attitude and identity, related to the development of L1/L2/L3 writing?

### **Context and population**

The “case” is Natsu, a multicompetent writer who can write in three languages: Japanese (L1), English (L2), and Chinese (L3). Natsu was chosen because of her unique experiences of learning both an L2 and a foreign language, having lived and studied high school for three years in an L2 context in Australia, and having been an exchange student for a year to learn Chinese. Although Natsu is the main case, an interesting feature of this study is that her data is compared with data from five groups of experienced and

inexperienced writers from a previous study. The genre under scrutiny is the argumentative essay as used in the major English language proficiency tests (e.g., IELTS).

## Procedure

To trace Natsu's development as a writer over time and across three languages, data collection occurred at two points in time with two and five years in between them and comprised both quantitative and qualitative data. These multiple data sources correspond to the three theories adopted in the study, about text production and composing processes across languages, genre knowledge, and author identity/attitude. In Period 1, data comprised essays written in L1 and L2, a written questionnaire, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews after the composition of each essay. In Period 2, Natsu was asked to write essays in L1, L2, and L3, in-depth interviews after each essay, as well as a final comprehensive interview. Additionally, retrospective stimulated recalls were used after each essay. Essay writing was time-constrained (60 minutes, paper/pencil). For text production and composing processes, the authors focused on language output measures, text features, and pauses in the composing process, complementing their interpretation of these measures through interview data. Natsu's text production was compared with data from other student groups in earlier studies.

## Findings

Several themes and patterns of interference across the three languages were detected in Natsu's development. In terms of L1 and L2 linguistic development over time, at Period 1, Natsu's writing proficiency in L2 English far exceeded that of the comparison student groups (novices and returnees), while her proficiency in L1 Japanese writing was surprisingly low. In Period 2, Natsu's L2 writing proficiency was still much higher than the comparison student groups' (expert writers), while her writing proficiency in L1 caught up with that of the other undergraduate writers. Interviews revealed that her high English proficiency was explained in part by the three years of L2 high-school literacy, combined with her intense training to pass the proficiency exams required to study abroad (TOEIC and IELTS). Interestingly, Natsu admitted in interviews that she applied academic writing knowledge obtained in L2 to writing in L1. Natsu also established a personal authorial identity in her texts in L1, L2, and L3. Overall, findings revealed several overlaps in her L1, L2, and L3 writing, suggesting that Natsu's writing knowledge over time became

merged, but also included awareness of several unique linguistic and stylistic differences related to the socio-rhetorical dimensions of the genre and the readers.

Regarding composing processes in L1, L2, and L3, while Natsu's overall composing time was approximately the same for all three languages, findings showed that different processes (*planning, formulating, and re-formulating*) took different times during the process, due to consideration of genre and identity attached to each language. These dimensions of genre knowledge and identity emerged clearly from the interviews, which overall illuminated how deliberate, stylistic choices across languages suggested a developing meta-knowledge of genre across languages and an authorial self.

As mentioned, in addition to the solid theoretical grounding, a key strength of this study is the originality of the data collection procedure and the variety of the data collection methods employed, comprising both qualitative and quantitative measures. An interesting feature to highlight is that while this is a longitudinal study, it is not an ethnographic study: the authors did not continuously follow the case over time (fieldwork) nor provide a "thick, ethnographic description" (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013, p. 26) of the social context in which Natsu developed her skills, but rather collected data at two points in time combining naturalistically occurring data with interviews and quantitative data. Nevertheless, it succeeds in providing a comprehensive and complex picture of the participant's writing development in three languages, by triangulating in a clever way measures of text fluency and composing with data that provides the participant's own perspective, such as the stimulated recall sessions and in-depth interviews.

Overall, a key characteristic that makes this study exemplary is the care with which each data collection measure and procedure for analysis was chosen, considering the specific case and the research questions. For instance, measures of writing proficiency were adapted to be suitable for English and Japanese. As mentioned, in order to provide a sense of comparison, this quantitative data from the case study participant was compared with data obtained from other students, showing that a multitude of data sources can be used in case studies if and when they are justified by the research question. The adoption of stimulated recall sessions to discuss pauses in composing was another creative method, providing both quantitative, tangible data about the process (in the form of pauses) and an insider explanation of the process that illuminated many interesting inter-language

influences as well as unique reasons for the composing process associated with each language. Finally, and consistently with Kobayashi and Rinnert's cognitive and sociocultural approach, the in-depth interviews right after writing the essays revealed the participant's unique history, attitudes, and experiences of learning to write in the three languages, shedding light on how motivation, goals, genre knowledge, personal authorial identity, and experience interact in a multilingual writer's thinking when composing in either of their languages.

The case study methodology adopted by Kobayashi and Rinnert, while limited to the argumentative time-constrained test essay genre, made a strong contribution to multicompetence theory, by showing that the development of writing competence is not only multifaceted but is still ongoing both in L1 and L2 (and in part in L3) in multilingual writers, with writing knowledge (genre knowledge) and authorial identity merging and refining as time and experiences accrue. Their study illustrates how assumptions of L1 dominance are poorly suited for understanding the writing competence of multilingual writers, where transfer may occur from any language that the learner perceives as closer to their identity, has recency, or provides some level of similarity with the language used. Notably, this transfer is not necessarily unconscious but rather suggests a merged, hybrid, and fluid meta-knowledge of writing as posed by Gentil (2011), for instance of genres, their socio-rhetorical dimensions across languages, and the organizational and discoursal patterns that are shareable.

## 2.7 Future research directions

Here we present possible directions for research using case studies that we think would be productive for genre research and pedagogy. First, it would be interesting to investigate the value of case studies as a pedagogical tool. While case studies are primarily a research approach, they have been used successfully for teaching in various fields (Andersen & Schiano, 2014; Christensen & Hansen, 1987). In genre research, published case studies can be used to illustrate genre production and variation (e.g., Khuder & Petrić, 2022b), and could thus be useful both in the genre classroom and for teacher training. Some examples of application to genre pedagogy: novice writers could focus on a specific learner genre, typically assigned in university courses at their institution, and use each other as cases, investigating and discussing similarities and differences in task perceptions and writing process. More advanced students, especially at the doctoral level, could use case studies both as a methodology and as a way to learn about

behind-the-scenes processes in relation to high-stakes genres (e.g., grants) or unfamiliar genres. Case studies provide the opportunity for learners to develop context-dependent knowledge that over time builds expertise (Flyvberg, 2011).

This focus on building concrete and contextually dependent knowledge dovetails nicely with the aims of genre pedagogy: to help learners develop an understanding of the contextually situated nature of genres, as manifested in linguistic and rhetorical choices, as well as a broader meta-knowledge of how to recontextualize and transfer genre knowledge across situations (cf. Tardy et al., 2020). While rhetorical move-step analysis (see Casal & Kessler, this volume) as a pedagogy typically requires the comparison of several examples of a genre (or genres), learners may also benefit from the richness and depth that is to be gained by focusing more closely on a case, to appreciate how the writing process interacts with the contextual and socio-rhetorical dimension of genre production.

While our first suggestion for future research is pedagogical, the second suggestion is methodological. The reviewed studies above focused either on texts (e.g., McGrath, 2016) or on writers' knowledge development (e.g., Tardy, 2005) but rarely on both (e.g., De Oliveira & Lan, 2014). It would be interesting to investigate how the dialogic interaction between teachers and students (e.g., in the form of feedback) or different co-authors (comments to a text) leads to genre knowledge development and genre production, for instance through text histories (see Khuder & Petrić, 2022a). For example, if the case study focuses on a writer's textual and conceptual development of a specific genre, data can include interviews with all authors and literacy brokers involved in the text, including the main case, in addition to the main case's uptake of these comments and perceptions of the changes made. Such a holistic overview of development can give the reader a better idea of how interactions about texts between various co-authors and/or language tutors impact both the text and the writer.

Finally, we believe that genre research would be greatly enriched by conducting case studies similar to our example study (i.e., Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013), examining the complex and dynamic relationship between genre knowledge and learning experiences in multilingual writers. The need for this research has been advocated both by Gentil (2011) and Tardy et al. (2020), as needed to move toward a clearer theoretical articulation of how writing knowledge transfers and develops across languages and genres, or to borrow Gentil's (2011) question: "How does genre knowledge intersect with writing expertise and language knowledge?" (p. 19).

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