

THE EFFECTS OF AUTHENTIC READING ACTIVITIES ON THE WRITTEN  
PRODUCTION OF NOVICE COLLEGE SPANISH STUDENTS

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of Modern Languages and  
Classics in the Graduate School of  
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2014

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## ABSTRACT

Many scholars have researched reading-to-writing relations, some of which found reading to be an effective enhancer of writing (Al-Jarf, 2004; Asenciór, 2006; Lee, 1986a; Lee & Riley, 1990; Pérez-Sotelo & González-Bueno, 2003; Shang, 2007). Similar beginner college student samples were used previously by Asenciór (2006), Pérez-Sotelo and González-Bueno (2003), and Lee and Riley (1990). However, the current study was the first one to examine the effects of authentic readings on the written production of novice college Spanish students, especially on content/vocabulary and text organization.

The present research included an experimental group and a control group. There were six written assignments over a 4-month period. The pretest and the posttest compared the overall writing abilities of the participating groups. During the treatment proper, the experimental group was asked to review four different authentic reading texts before writing, whereas the control group completed the assignments without any prior reading activity. The gains of the combined dependent variables content/vocabulary and text organization were analyzed.

First, the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed on the participants' gains in overall writing scores from pretest (Writing Assignment 1) to posttest (Writing Assignment 6) showed that authentic reading comprehension activities did not improve their writing abilities. Second, the results of the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the gains from Writing Assignment 2 to Writing Assignment 5 in terms of content/vocabulary and text organization revealed that the experimental treatment did not have a

statistically significant main effect on either one of the two dependent variables. However, group and gender had a statistically significant interactive effect on both dependent variables. Finally, the findings of the postexperimental survey administered to the participants in the experimental group revealed moderately positive attitudes toward the use of authentic readings prior to the writing assignments. The gender differences revealed by this investigation warrant further and more detailed research to determine possible underlying causes.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| ACTFL         | American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages |
| <i>ANOVA</i>  | Analysis of Variance                                  |
| <i>MANOVA</i> | Multivariate Analysis of Variance                     |
| SL            | Second Language                                       |
| FL            | Foreign Language                                      |
| ESL           | English as Second Language                            |
| L1            | First Language  |
| L2            | Second Language                                       |
| CLT           | Communicative Language Teaching                       |
| IV            | Independent Variable                                  |
| DV            | Dependent Variable                                    |

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to humbly thank all the people who have helped me to make this dissertation possible, to whom I am eternally grateful. First and foremost, I want to thank my director Dr. Alicia Cipria, who has been my mentor and guide, and Dr. Erin O'Rourke, for devoting her time to the meticulous scrutiny of the whole dissertation. Without their support, wisdom, and input this dissertation would not have been possible. I also want to thank all the members of my committee, Dr. Douglas Lightfoot, Dr. Michael Picone, and Dr. Robert Nelson, for all their comments and expertise to enhance the final results of this study. I would also like to thank my dear friends, Dr. Mary Maxwell, for her time, patience, and hard work, and Dr. Francia Martínez, who helped me immensely at times when I needed her most; all their help has been invaluable to me. Additionally, I want to thank all my colleagues and friends, especially Laura Rubio, Timothy Alford, Dr. Mónica Flórez, and Ally Firestone, for being there for me when I needed a couple of eyes to go over the data; I am infinitely grateful to all of them. Finally, I would like to thank all my family, whose support and encouragement gave me the strength to go on.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Native speakers of any language, when confronted with a writing task, will often refer to texts for background information to assist with content, vocabulary, and organization of the text. In a similar way, language teachers should try to develop a similar behavior in their students, that is, to utilize reading texts when learning how to write in the target language. This practice is especially important for novice students because these learners typically have limited knowledge of the syntax, vocabulary, content, and text organization of the target language. Consequently, instructors ought to make use of the suitable resources and tools they find to help learners develop the initial foundations of their writing ability. Although there are different opinions about the use of authentic texts at the novice level, there is no doubt that their use engages students in real-life situations and can serve to motivate them.

One question not addressed in the literature is whether authentic texts can help enhance beginning students' writing, especially their text organization, content, and vocabulary. The researcher's background of teaching experience and the generally accepted guidelines for the communicative classroom (Savignon, 2001) reflect the following in relation to beginning level Spanish classes: First, classes at the novice level are mainly devoted to speaking. Students are encouraged to work in pairs or groups and interact with their classmates through the use of communicative activities. Second, typically language students at the beginner level are learning how to be literate in a foreign language but have few opportunities to see authentic reading materials.

Yet in order to prepare students to engage in real-life situations, they should be exposed to authentic reading materials from the early stages of language learning. Authentic materials can give students the necessary input that aids in the acquisition of the target language. As Brown (2007) stated, providing authentic language in the classroom is just as relevant at novice level. Furthermore, he emphasized the goals for a beginning level course by pointing out that reading and writing topics are confined to brief but nevertheless real-life written material.... The most important contextual factor that you should bear in mind in teaching reading and writing to beginners is their literacy level in their own native language. (p. 124)

In connection with the previous discussion, two key aspects appear to arise when considering the reading-to-writing relation: input and motivation. Fotos (2001) said that “input provides essential positive evidence, the language data that allows acquisition to occur” (p. 271). According to Grab and Kaplan (1996), “Reading and writing are reciprocal activities; the outcome of a reading activity can serve as input for writing” (p. 297). Moreover, Hirvela (2004) affirmed that when considering reading for writing, the notion of reading should be extended:

Instead of assigning texts because of the information about a subject, we can also take into account texts’ value as sources of knowledge or input about writing itself. Ideally we’ll want our developing L2 writers to learn about writing itself—not just the subject at hand—through what they read. (p. 113)

Kroll (1993) asserted that “one can read a text not only to ‘learn’ its content but to ‘learn’ choices the writers have made in producing it” (p. 72). All of the previously mentioned scholars seem to agree that language instructors can help students improve their writing skills by making them read, or by guiding them through, different texts to “acquire knowledge about L2 writing by looking at the rhetorical decisions made by the authors, that is, why certain information was arranged as it was by the author (i.e., rhetorical reading)” (p. 113).

When describing the relation of reading to writing, Hirvela (2004) used the term *mining*.

The latter is defined as “the process of reading with the intention of learning about writing” (p. 115), as if the reader were “digging” to find “a valuable resource.” In other words,

learners using reading to gain knowledge about writing act as miners exploring their source texts for the input being sought. In a classroom setting under the guidance of a teacher, the kinds of knowledge students look for may be identified ahead of time, perhaps using the labels mentioned earlier—rhetorical, linguistic, or lexical input. (p. 115)

Kroll (2001) established that texts provide models of writing in the target language that the students are learning. Furthermore, she stated that “close reading exercises can be done to draw students’ attention to particular stylistic choices, grammatical features, methods of development, makers of cohesion, and so on” (p. 225).

As far as motivation is concerned, Brown (2007) defined it by stating, “Motivation is the extent to which you make choices about (a) goals to pursue and (b) the effort you will devote to that pursuit” (p. 85). One of the goals of teachers should be to act as “facilitators” (p. 94) of the language, facilitating the students’ learning process by having them focus on their abilities and what they can do with the language. Consequently, the choice of reading material should consider the learners’ level, especially with authentic texts, as Brown (2007) established: “Authentic simple texts can either be devised or located in the real world. From ads to labels to reports to essays, texts are available that are grammatically and lexically simple” (p. 374).

Authenticity is an important consideration in every language classroom, including the beginner levels. Brown (2007) suggested that teacher talk should be simple but natural. Furthermore, he stated that sometimes the language used with beginner students “may appear to be artificial because of all the repetition needed at this stage” (p. 119). Yet he advised not to despair, as the learners will be thankful for being exposed to authentic language. Based on this view, then, instructors should expose learners to authentic written language when reading

because the input will benefit acquisition of the written style, including the formalities and conventions of that particular language.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

This study examined the significance of authentic reading activities in enhancing the writing of novice university students of Spanish to help them improve text organization, content, and vocabulary. Encouraging students to persist in the effort of being in contact with authentic materials at the very early stages of language learning provides an invaluable source for building their communicative competence. Additionally, the present study enriches the area of reading-to-writing relations and adds to the literature (a) by examining the effects that authentic texts have on the written production of novice students especially in organization, content, and vocabulary, and (b) by studying the impact authentic texts have on the learners' production and beginner students' perceptions of authentic materials. This research, *A Study on the Effects of Authentic Reading Activities on the Written Production of Novice College Spanish Students*, was approved by the IRB under protocol 11-OR-203 (Appendix A).

### **Research Questions**

This study attempts to explore the possible effects of authentic readings on the written production of novice college-level students of Spanish. The researcher utilized a two-phase, sequential, mixed-method design. The first phase was the quantitative research and the second phase was the qualitative one. The study was sequential because the second phase developed from the first, such that the qualitative results assisted in interpreting the students' perception of the study .

The goal of the first phase was to obtain quantitative results from two different groups of university students at the novice level of Spanish. The pilot study took place in Fall 2011, and

the main study in Spring 2012. The control and the experimental groups completed six written assignments required at this level and followed the instructions the researcher gave them at the beginning of the course. The experimental group was asked to read a text related to the writing topic before doing the written assignment. Therefore, the independent variable was having done the assigned reading activity prior to doing the writing assignment, and the dependent variable was the students' performance in the writing assignments, and the treatment given to them.

The first writing task for both groups was the pretest, and the last writing task was the posttest. For the pretest and posttest, the researcher and three other raters focused on both groups' linguistic levels and, at the end of the study, both the pre- and posttests scores were compared. This determined if the intervention had any effect on the linguistic level of the experimental group.

As far as the treatment was concerned, the experimental group would meet on a day assigned by the researcher at the language lab one class before their writing assignment was due. At each of these four meetings the experimental group was then asked to read a short authentic text prior to writing the required paragraph for Writing Assignments 2 to 5. The students were then asked to answer some multiple-choice questions regarding the content, vocabulary, and text organization in regard to the reading (Appendix B).

Each of the Writing Assignments 2-5 (independent variable) was corrected following a rubric on content/vocabulary and text organization that was created by the researcher based on the rubric provided by the Basic Spanish Language Program (Appendices C and D).

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) and a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were conducted to examine the data. These tests allowed the researcher to determine the average

scores as well as the interaction of the variables and determine the statistical significance of the study.

In the second phase of the study, a qualitative survey was used to examine the students' attitude toward the study. The survey was administered at the end of the semester.

The present study put forward the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What is the impact that authentic reading comprehension activities have on novice students' overall writing abilities demonstrated on writing assignments?

Research Question 2: What is the impact that authentic reading comprehension activities have on the content/vocabulary development of students' writing assignments?

Research Question 3: What is the impact that authentic reading comprehension activities have on the organization of students' writing assignments?

Research Question 4: What are the students' perceptions of the reading comprehension activities to enhance students' writing assignments?

Based on the research questions and the literature discussion presented, the following hypotheses were defined:

Hypothesis 1: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve students' overall writing abilities demonstrated on writing assignments.

Hypothesis 2: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve the content/vocabulary of students' writing assignments.

Hypothesis 3: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve the organization of students' writing assignments

Hypothesis 4: Students will perceive the authentic reading comprehension activities as helpful in improving their writing skills.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research is intended to contribute to the field of applied linguistics by providing support for the use of authentic reading texts prior to completing a writing assignment in a novice foreign language class. As to the foreign language classroom, it is hoped that the results

and conclusions of the quantitative and qualitative studies will contribute to the improvement of the teaching of writing and a better understanding of how to connect the skills of reading and writing in the foreign language classroom at the novice level. Furthermore, pedagogical materials that are developed with these conclusions in mind will help foreign language students familiarize themselves with authentic texts in the target language by preparing them to approach the readings and use these texts to elaborate upon and enhance their writing, that is, the act of composing. Additionally, it is expected that the conclusions from this study will help learners realize the significance of the use of authentic materials in the language classroom as an aid in their writings. Another benefit will be to promote integrated material development in language departments so that the use of authentic reading activities to enhance writing is implemented at all language levels. By shedding light on other areas of writing instruction, it is hoped that this research will contribute to future research on reading and writing relations in more advanced language classes.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms, which are utilized throughout the dissertation, are listed here with their definitions.

*ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* provide a detailed description of the proficiency levels and assessment to measure language performance. ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages is an individual membership organization “dedicated to the improvement and expansion of the teaching and learning of all languages at all levels of instruction” (ACTFL 2012, p. 1).

*Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)* is a complex statistical tool (Rasinger, 2008, p. 168).

*Authentic Materials* refer to “those that were intended for use by native speakers of the language and are thus not tailored to a particular language-learning curriculum” (Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 140).

*Authentic Texts.* “Authentic texts have been defined as “real-life texts, not written for pedagogic purposes” (Wallace, 1992, p. 145). They are therefore written for native speakers and contain “real” language. They are “materials that have been produced to fulfil [sic] some social purpose in the language community” (Peacock, 1997), in contrast to non-authentic texts that are “especially designed for language learning purposes” (Berardo, 2006, p. 61).

*Beginner/Novice Level Students.* There are true beginner and false beginner learners. First, the language proficiency of a true beginner is characterized by the use of “a few memorized words or phrases, with little or no syntactic variation beyond the scope of prefabricated, familiar material at their disposal” (Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 16). Second, the language proficiency of a false beginner is described as presenting some characteristics of an intermediate level “simple sentences or phrases, normally limited to the present time” (p. 17), and the language is “quite inaccurate” (p. 17). The students at beginner level at this southern university enroll in the introductory Spanish language and culture course. Students who have never taken Spanish before or students who have taken Spanish more than 4 years ago (false beginners) are allowed to enroll in the university introductory course, SP 101.

*Communicative Competence.* This term can be traced back to the 1970s when Hymes reacted to “Chomsky’s characterization of the linguistic competence of the ‘ideal native speaker’ and proposed the term *communicative competence* to represent the use of language in social context, or the observance of sociolinguistic norms of appropriacy” (Savignon, 2001, p. 16). Furthermore, “Savignon (1972) used the term *communicative competence* to characterize the

ability of classroom language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to recite dialogs or perform on discrete point tests of grammatical knowledge” (Savignon, 2001, p. 16).

*Content* is one of the variables measured in the students’ writing in this study. It refers to how the information is conveyed. Snow (2001) stated that in content-based instruction “the focus is on the subject matter and not on the form or, as Krashen says on ‘what is being said rather than how’ (p. 62)” (p. 304). The former defines the meaning of this category in the rubric in this study. Content measures the development of the main topic, how ideas are related, and whether they are consistent (Brown, 2007, p. 413).

*Dependent Variable.* “It is the observed outcome of the experiment” (Rasinger, 2008, p. 23). In this particular study, it is the writing assignment grades.

*Independent Variable.* The independent variable is the variable that is “often deliberately manipulated by the researcher” (Rasinger, 2008, p. 23). In this particular study it is the prior use of an authentic reading text before writing.

*Input* “is the language that a learner hears (or reads) that has some kind of communicative intent. By communicative intent we mean that there is a message in the language that the learner is supposed to attend to; his or her job is to understand, to comprehend the meaning of the utterances or sentence” (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, pp. 25-26).

*Literacy.* “The ability to read and write (intransitively)” (Gee, 1998, p. 55).

*Organization* is another of the variables measured in the students’ writing in this study. It refers to how coordinated and structured the parts of the writing are. Organization rates effectiveness of introduction, logical sequence of ideas, and conclusion (Brown, 2007, p. 413).

*Reading*. There are many definitions of reading. The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines *reading* as the activity or skill of understanding written words. Berardo (2006) stated that “reading means different things to different people, for some it is recognizing written words, while for others it is an opportunity to teach pronunciation and practice speaking” (p. 60). Gee (1998) affirmed that

reading is at the very least the ability to interpret print (surely not just the ability to call out the names of letters), but the interpretation of print is just a viewpoint on a set of symbols, and viewpoints are always embedded in a discourse. (p. 54)

*Target language* refers to a language being studied other than the first language.

*T test* “is a statistical procedure that compares the arithmetic means of two groups of data while taking their variability (i.e., their standard deviation or variance) into account” (Rasinger, 2008, p. 179).

*Vocabulary* in this study refers to the vocabulary words covered in each of the units taught. According to Decarrico (2001), “vocabulary is central to language acquisition, whether the language is first, second or foreign” ( p. 285). Furthermore, she maintained that “students should learn very large vocabularies when they first start to acquire a language” (p. 287). Being that the experimental group was exposed to authentic readings before writing, the researcher decided to include vocabulary as part of content to examine whether more exposure to written language helped enhance the use of vocabulary and content development.

*Writing*, according to Omaggio Hadley (2001),

is best viewed as a continuum of activities that range from the more mechanical or formal aspects of writing down on the one end to the more complex act of composing on the other. This seems most sensible in a context of foreign language learning, where beginning language students must first struggle with the transcription of speech before they can engage in more complex forms of written expression. (p. 281)

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects that authentic readings have on the written production of novice college students. This chapter reviews research that helps clarify the scope and the purpose of this study. A broad spectrum of scholarly studies and linguistic theories support the need for using authentic texts to enhance the writing of beginner students in the language classroom.

This chapter first covers the language characteristics of beginner students and the definitions of reading and writing. Second, it includes the differences between SL (second language) and FL (foreign language), as the students in the present study are foreign language learners. Third, a detailed description of the historical overview of reading and writing together with the linguistic theories used in the present study are presented. Finally, a thorough review of SL and FL research is addressed, and reference is made to its contribution to the present study.

#### **Characteristics of the Language of Beginner Students**

This research was conducted with beginner students of Spanish. Omaggio Hadley (2001) referred to Ellis's (1985) view of language acquisition by stating that "there are identifiable global stages of development that all language learners seem to follow" (p. 20). She further pointed out that the stages of language development that Ellis delineated are in accordance with those described by the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). According to the ACTFL *Proficiency Guidelines*, true beginners' language proficiency is characterized by the use of "a few memorized words or phrases, with little or no syntactic

variation beyond the scope of prefabricated, familiar material at their disposal” (p. 16). On the other hand, the false beginner level of proficiency is described as presenting some characteristics of an intermediate level, with “simple sentences or phrases, normally limited to the present time” (p. 17), and the language is considered “quite inaccurate” (p. 17).

Developing literacy is a goal of beginning language classes. Being literate refers to the state of being able to read and write in that particular language. Bell and Burnaby (1984) stated, “We are likely to find that the range of literacy displayed in the ESL class is from zero to barely functional literacy—that is the ability to use print for survival purposes” (p. 3). Auerbach (1996) indicated that literacy “is more than just a set of discrete, mechanical skills or functional competencies” (p. xv). Regarding second language literacy training, Brown (1994) stated that “literacy programs are designed to teach students whose native language reading/writing skills are either non-existent or very poor” (p. 128). These students are trying to become literate in English as well as learn the oral language.

### **The Skills of Reading and Writing**

Reading and writing reinforce literacy skills. According to Barnett (1989), reading is seen “as communication, as a mental process, as the reader’s active participation in the creation of meaning, as a manipulation of strategies, as a receptive rather than a passive skill” (p. 2). Furthermore, Byrnes (1985) referred to reading skill as one in which readers “produce understanding” (p. 78). In other words, once students are able to comprehend a written text, then they are able to use that input to generate language. Omaggio Hadley (2001) stated that this is the case of students in the second and foreign language classroom, and teachers should gradually try to help learners improve “their written production in the direction of the conventions of proficient writers, teaching the cognitive processes of organization, elaboration, comparison and

contrast, explanation, generalization, and the like” (p. 281). She suggested that writing activities should be “contextualized, meaningful and personalized” (p. 282) for all students. If the activities are connected to real-life situations, this will facilitate both the learners’ writing process and motivation.

### **Second Language Versus a Foreign Language**

As reading and writing are directly tied to literacy, there is much literature on reading-to-writing relations in English as a second language (ESL) and as a foreign language (FL). A distinction should be drawn between these two types of instruction. Brown (1994), who made this distinction, considered English as an example of the language taught and established. ESL is taught in countries (such as the United States, the UK, or India) where English is the major language of commerce and education. English is also the language that students hear outside the walls of the classroom. In contrast, EFL refers specifically to English taught in countries (such as Japan, Egypt or Venezuela) where English is not a major language of commerce and education (p. 4).

These two types of language instruction are currently applied to the teaching of Spanish in the United States also. On the one hand, in some states such as Texas, Florida, and Arizona, Spanish is already an SL because of the exponential increase of the Hispanic population these states especially have undergone in the last decades. Consequently, in these states Spanish has become the language of commerce and education, and it is the language that students use outside the language class (Brown, 1994). On the other hand, in states such as Alabama, Georgia, and Virginia, Spanish is currently taught as an FL because it is not the major language outside the classroom walls (Brown, 1994) It is important to bear this distinction in mind, as the studies that

are conducted vary considerably when considering this difference between SL and FL as far as the learners' language proficiency and the focus of the studies are concerned.

As far as the teaching of literacy in a second language class, August et al. (2006) concluded from their literacy research that "literacy learning in one's second language differs from literacy learning in one's first language in that the oral base on which literacy builds is more variable across learners and potentially influenced by reading skills in the first language" (p. 352). August et al. reiterated that if learners were literate in their first language, it would help them become literate in the second language (L2).

However, the teaching of literacy to adult learners "must focus not on isolated skills but on socially significant literacy uses in the learners' lives. Meaning is more important than form in literacy education" (Auerbach, 1996, p. xv). Auerbach explained that literacy is considered to be a group of social customs that can change according to the different cultures, contexts, purposes, or individuals. She further considered the "culture-specific uses of oral language" (p. 9) that shape the way the learner takes and interprets the meaning through texts. The students' oral language performance should be used by the instructors to develop the students' reading and writing abilities.

Additionally, Auerbach (1996) emphasized that students should be able to interact with the text. Furthermore, the texts should be meaningful to them and be related to their lived experience because reading and writing are active processes. Culture also plays a very important role because cultural familiarity with the text shapes their reading processes. The teaching of skills should be "meaning centered" (p. 10). Auerbach (1996) made reference to literacy theory, which suggests that literacy should be meaningful to the learner as it should enable the students to better understand their world. She agreed with Freire's (1970) new approach to literacy

instruction, which stated that the teaching of literacy should analyze the learners' social reality and explore their social issues and concerns. Thus, literacy acquisition would enable them to become critical of their social conditions and issues that disempower them. In other words, he maintained that the content of adult literacy instruction should be connected to "meaningful and authentic language" (p.11) and should mirror the learners' reality so that literacy helps them change their reality. This is the model Auerbach (1996) used in the project that she and her collaborators carried out to train immigrant instructors to teach ESL/literacy to immigrants and refugees from their own communities.

However, when instructors teach reading in another language, they help the learner construct the meaning of the text by activating background knowledge. This is known as schema theory. Cook (2001) defined *schema* as "the background knowledge on which the interpretation of the text depends" (p. 89). He further explained that the interpretation of the text can be different in each reader, as it is derived from the reader's previous knowledge and preferences. Moreover, Brown (1994) asserted that "skill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world" (p. 284).

Additionally, there are different genres of writing, such as fiction, nonfiction, letters, emails, menus, forms, labels, and signs, just to name a few. Brown (1994) stated that every person can distinguish a menu from a letter or a report, know what the purpose in reading any of the above is, and "bring various schemata to bear on the message chosen to derive" (p. 287). Instructors teaching writing in another language, for example, should help students develop strategies to derive the meaning of the different genres and to prepare them for the act of composing. When teaching writing in another language at beginner levels, as Omaggio Hadley

(2001) affirmed, “writing is directed in some fashion in the lower ranges of proficiency to support that which is learned in class” (p. 282).

In the next subsections of the literature review, the history of reading and writing relations, the theoretical as well as pedagogical implications of reading-writing relations, and the different studies conducted in the field are presented. These subsections offer relevant insight into the theoretical framework of the study.

### **Historical Overview of Reading and Writing Skills**

In order to enhance foreign language students’ writing through the use of reading comprehension activities, it is necessary to understand what preceded the kind of research that is needed today. Celce-Murcia (1991) sketched the historical development of the approaches to language teaching in the 20th century. Yet before getting into this distinction, she made reference to language teaching methodology prior to the 20th century, which vacillated between “*getting the learners to use the language* (i.e. to speak and understand) vs. *getting the learners to analyze language* (i.e. to learn its grammatical rules)” (p. 3). In Greek times and during the Medieval period, people were taught how to use a foreign language. The educated elite were fluent writers, readers, and speakers of the classical language. Aural-oral techniques were used with no textbook but a set of handwritten copies, with perhaps a few texts in the target language or words listed in the target language next to the equivalent translation. During the Renaissance, Latin began to be abandoned and replaced by European vernaculars. The main teaching technique at the time encompassed imitation, repetition, practice of reading and speaking, and use of pictures.

During the 19th century, the teaching of Latin and classical texts became popular once again, along with the grammar-translation approach. There was little use of the target language,

and students were exposed early to reading difficult texts. A typical exercise was that of translation from the native language to the target language.

At the turn of the 20th century the direct method became the new alternative in language teaching. It emphasized the ability to use the language rather than analyzing the language. Teaching focused on speaking and pronunciation in reaction to the grammar translation method. The students read literary texts for pleasure, but texts were not analyzed grammatically. This approach became popular in France, Germany, and America. Yet in the 1930s and 1940s in the United States, there were few foreign language teachers who were fluent in foreign languages, so the reading approach was used. Therefore, students were expected to read the foreign language and understand the grammar that would help them understand the texts.

Matsuda (2001b) pointed out that concerns over the skills of reading and writing began in the 1960s because of the then-popular audiolingual approach, which overemphasized the spoken over the written. In fact, there were a number of assumptions made about spoken language at the time, among them, “‘Language is speech’ (Brooks, 1960; Finocchiaro, 1964; Rivers, 1968) or ‘Writing is a secondary representation of speech’ (Brooks, 1960; Finocchiaro, 1964; Lado, 1964)” (p. 84). However, Matsuda (2001a) reported that the audiolingual approach was not the only factor causing the neglect of reading and writing skills at the time. He stated that the beliefs that existed about the written language preceded the rise of the audiolingual approach. Although, the teaching of writing was being considered as a subject of interest in second language (L2) classrooms in the 1950s, the audiolingual approach became popular, and as a result reading and writing were not fully integrated. Furthermore, Matsuda (2001a) made a distinction between audiolingualism and the audiolingual approach. Audiolingualism can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was a reaction against “the perceived dominance of the traditional, text-based

approach to language teaching that was derived from the teaching of Latin" (p. 86). Henry Sweet was one of the leaders of the movement. He was an English phonetician who believed in the supremacy of the spoken language. He believed speaking should be taught before writing. He also encouraged learning all four skills. Once the learner mastered the spoken language, he could then move on to the written language. Reading provided the context for writing so that the writings were based on texts that the learners were familiar with in the second language, and the students would then think in the target language when composing.

Sweet's theory about language teaching influenced both Charles C. Fries (1887-1967) and Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949), who were the first two U.S. applied linguists. Fries was a well-known English linguist at the University of Michigan when he became involved in the teaching of ESL in the 1930s. He announced what came to be known as the oral approach. The English Language Institute (ELI) was founded at The University of Michigan in 1941. Matsuda (2001a) stated that reading and writing skills were a small part of the program in 1942 and 1943, but they had been eliminated by 1945. As there was an increase in the number of international students in the 1950s because of the end of WWII, an ESL writing course was created at the University of Michigan. The ELI published a number of textbooks and even professional books that became known inside and outside the United States. Many ESL writing programs incorporated Fries' program during the 1960s and 1970s.

Bloomfield developed an approach to language teaching that focused basically on the spoken language as well. He designed a textbook for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). The goal of this program was for students to acquire oral fluency. Some readings on topics such as history or geography were included in the program, but writing was not considered a relevant skill. This program had a significant influence on the area of foreign language teaching

for a short time, and other language programs were modeled after this one across the United States. This method, which came to be known as “the army method,” was adapted to fit the needs in other teaching language contexts and later came to be known as the audiolingual approach (Matsuda, 2001a).

By the 1960s the teaching of writing began to rise as the number of international students in American colleges and universities increased. The teaching of ESL became one of the main points of discussion at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC):

Too much attention had been paid to the spoken language, and writing had been neglected. Therefore, trained professionals were needed in the field of ESL. In 1966 TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) was established, and “writing issues were divided into first and second language components, and second language writing came to be associated almost exclusively with L2 studies” (Matsuda, 2001a, p. 99).

On the other hand, in Britain the oral-situational approach was a reaction to the reading approach in the 40s, 50s, and 60s (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Speaking was the primary skill. Reading and writing were only taught after the grammar and vocabulary were presented orally. In the 1970s in the United States, the cognitive approach was a reaction to the audiolingual approach. Rule acquisition was the basis of language learning. The teaching of reading and writing was as important as the teaching of speaking and listening. On the other hand, the affective-humanistic approach was a reaction against audiolingualism and the cognitive approach: Class atmosphere and individual feelings were emphasized, and peer work and group work were used as learning strategies.

In the 1980s the comprehension-based approach was the result of research in first language acquisition. Listening comprehension was the most important skill. Learners began

listening and then speaking. On the other hand, the communicative approach integrated all the language. Krashen's views on the teaching of reading and writing in second-language instruction in the 1980s included four stages. There was an initial stage that allowed a silent period (listening). This was followed by the oral production and then the teaching of reading and writing. Additionally, Krashen (1984) stated that as far as reading and writing are concerned, we gain competence in writing the same way we gain competence in oral language: by understanding messages encoded in written language, by reading for meaning. In this way we gain a subconscious "feel" for written language, we acquire this code as a second dialect. (pp. 27-28)

In other words, according to Krashen (1984) reading provides the input for writing.

On the other hand, communicative language teaching (CLT) is the new method that has been put forth around the world to teach languages. Communication in language teaching is understood as negotiation of meaning. Savignon (2001) defined *communicative competence* as "the ability of classroom learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning" (p. 16). Yet she explained that in order to make classes more communicative-oriented not only grammar should be taught but also interconnectedness of sentences and utterance in a text as well as social rules of language use. Language should be taught in real communicative life situations so that the learners are able to use the language eventually in the real world. Once we prepare students in class, they should be able to use that language outside of class. Therefore, communicative language teaching is not exclusively concerned with oral communication, but as Savignon (2001) pointed out, "the principles apply equally to reading and writing activities that involve readers and writers engaged in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning; the goals of CLT depend on learner needs in a given context" (p. 27). Therefore, the integration of the four skills is important together with including students' interests and needs.

The next section contains an in-depth discussion of the theoretical and pedagogical considerations for reading and writing on which this dissertation is based.

### **Theoretical Framework and Pedagogical Considerations for Reading and Writing**

According to Grabe (2003) the relation of reading and writing has been a topic of interest since the 1980s. The field of first language (L1) acquisition research as far as reading and writing relations are concerned has developed faster than that of second/foreign language (L2) acquisition. At first the findings of L1 research context in reading and writing relations were thought to apply in an L2 context. Yet it was observed that there were cultural as well as language differences among L2 students. Language limitations as far as text selection was concerned impaired students' performance. Furthermore, cultural differences in writing techniques was another challenge because "language and background knowledge are used to comprehend and generate messages" (Grabe, 2001, p. 17). As far as theories of reading, writing, and reading-writing relations in L1 and L2,

the study of reading-writing relations must be grounded in theories of reading and writing that can stand independently. Reading-writing relations should then build on these theories and offer a framework that explains the ways in which reading and writing together enhance language, literacy, and content learning. Such a framework can offer teachers a richer understanding of how to assemble a course designed to promote literacy and language skills. (Grabe, 2003, p. 244)

It is important for the teachers to consider L2 speakers' limitations with the language when they assign a text to be used as part of a writing task. Therefore, Grabe (2003) maintained in this respect: "Considerations need to be given to the roles of language knowledge and background knowledge, cognitive processing, motivation, social context factors and learning opportunities (Grabe, 2001; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996)" (p. 244).

In addition to taking into consideration cultural differences, the instructor selects relevant, age appropriate reading selections. Hirvela (2001) addressed the problem many teachers may have when choosing a text for reading-writing instruction:

The issue many L2 writing (and reading) teachers confront is not whether to link reading and writing but how to do so meaningfully. Such questions as to what texts to use and what to do with those texts are crucial in integrated reading-writing instruction. (p. 110)

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that teachers pay attention to the significance of text selection if they want to motivate students and enhance language learning.

The current research focused on the teaching of reading to writing to beginner students. These students' command of the language was almost nonexistent, yet there were cultural and linguistic aspects of the Spanish language that could be introduced at that level. As Delpit (1988) established that each culture should value its own linguistic aspects, the researcher introduced unique characteristics of the Spanish spoken in Argentina, for example, through the readings that were presented to the students. They were able to familiarize themselves with some regional vocabulary and expressions and discover the unique and special regional characteristics of the Spanish language. Later, they came in touch with the different styles of the Spanish language, and by understanding the linguistic differences that exist among the different Latin American countries, they started identifying each country's individual characteristics and cultures. This study helped the students develop their writing skills and at the same time afforded a view of cultures and stereotypes.

### **Competence/Performance Theory**

Hirvela (2004) pointed out the comparison made by Krashen (1984) between *competence* and *performance*, when referring to the acquisition of the writing skill. Competence refers to "knowledge of something" (p. 112) and performance to the production or "to the ability to use

the knowledge stored in competence" (p. 112). Consequently, as stated previously, Krashen (1984) affirmed that reading is the necessary input to gain competence in writing. Moreover, according to Krashen, the writing skill undergoes the same process as the oral skill; he further stated that

the competence/performance theory implies that instruction in writing should not focus on teaching form directly, but should instead encourage the subconscious acquisition of form through reading and give students procedures that will facilitate the discovery of meaning and an efficient writing process. (p. 39)

Hirvela (2004) also affirmed that "knowledge of writing comes from the input provided by reading" (p. 112) and pointed out Krashen's use of the word *form*, which referred to the "rules and conventions of writing" (p. 112). What this signifies is that it is not advisable to give L2 learners explicit writing rules about writing in the target language, because often these rules vary significantly from the conventions of the ones in their native language and confuse students. On the other hand, Hirvela (2004) suggested assigning students reading materials and activities that could help them "internalize L2 writing rules and conventions, thus putting in place the competence they must draw from while attempting to write in the target language" (p. 112). Therefore, he asserted that if competence is established, adequate performance in L2 will occur because the role of reading is to set the foundation for the rules of writing in the target language.

Cook (2007), however, pointed out that Krashen's theory of language learning has been disputed by many scholars. Gregg (1984), for instance, stated that Krashen's theory of language learning lacked clarity and had significant flaws as it lacked experimental content and explanation. MacLaughlin (1987) established that Krashen's work lacked precision since the terms he used were not defined, which resulted in a weak, and unclear theory. Mitchell and Myles (2004) regarded Krashen's formula 'i+1' (where i represents the students' language competence and 1 represents the teacher's input, which goes beyond one step of the students'

language competence) as vague because it is not clear as to which aspects of language the formula is to be applied, whether it be syntax, lexis, or phonology, for example. Although Krashen's theory of language learning still poses a lot of questions, Hirvela (2004) considered the implications and applications of the theory to the language classroom valid and strong with respect to the reading-writing relations.

### **Schema Theory and Pedagogical Activities**

As one of the purposes of this study is to help students become literate in another language, it is important to analyze schema theory in detail. Cook (2001) defined *schema* as “the background knowledge on which the interpretation of the text depends” (p. 89). Brown (2007) also pointed out, “The reader brings information, knowledge, emotion, experience, and culture—that is, schemata (plural)—to the printed world” (p. 358). Moreover, Clarke and Silberstein (1977) stated the following:

Research has shown that reading is only incidentally visual. More information is contributed by the reader than by the print on the page. That is, readers understand what they read because they are able to take the stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign it membership to an appropriate group of concepts already stored in their memories.... Skill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world. (pp. 136-137)

Moreover, Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) quoted Immanuel Kant (1963), who stated the following about reading comprehension: “New information, new concepts new ideas can have meaning only when they can be related to something the individual already knows” (p. 553). Furthermore, they affirmed that schema theory supports Kant’s observation. Carrell and Eisterhold stated that schema theory “only provides directions for listeners or readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own, previously acquired knowledge” (p. 556). They further defined this acquired knowledge as “the reader’s background knowledge” (p. 556), and this background information is referred to as the *schemata*. The act of comprehending a text entails

interaction between the text and the reader's background knowledge; it involves more than just depending on linguistic knowledge:

According to schema theory, the process of interpretation is guided by the principle that every input is mapped against some existing schema and that all aspects of that schema must be compatible with the input information. This principle results in two basic modes of information processing, called bottom-up and top-down processing. (p. 557)

In other words, background information is hierarchically organized from the most global at the top to the most specific at the bottom. Top-down and bottom-up processing should occur at the same time. On the one hand, bottom-up processing ensures that the reader/listener is aware of the new information. On the other hand, top-down processing helps the reader/listener choose among the different possible interpretations of the data. Furthermore, Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) indicated that one of the main obstacles encountered in reading comprehension is that many times the reader has established an interpretation of the text that was not the one intended by the writer. This interpretation comes from the reader's background knowledge and not from the text proper. Brown (2007) stated that content schemata is related to the reader's knowledge of the world and culture, for example, and formal schemata is related to language knowledge and discourse structure. Many times there is misinterpretation of the content schema because it is culturally specific and not known to the reader.

Schema theory has been challenged by some scholars. Nassaji (2002) suggested that the idea of background knowledge is "connectionist models of memory" (p. 453). Nassaji said that "background knowledge is not 'pre-stored' but rather it emerges in the context of the task, and it is relatively unstructured as opposed to the highly structured knowledge representations suggested by ...schema theory" (p. 453). Brown (2007) concluded that through this proposed model the reader seems to have a more active role when constructing meaning than the one suggested by schema theory.

Moreover, Omaggio Hadley (2001) referred to background knowledge and the learner's interest in the topic and how these affect the learner's comprehension of the text or stretch of speech in a reading or listening task. In a study conducted in 1932, Bartlett examined what learners were able to remember about folk tales from other cultures. It was suggested that many omissions and distortions in the tales were probably due to cultural differences. Another study by Carrell and Wise (1998) affirmed that background knowledge is not always activated and that factors such as background knowledge or interest in a topic can vary among different student populations and language levels. They suggested that students should be exposed to familiar and motivating topics and allow them to pick their readings whenever possible. Barry and Lazarte (1995) examined the effects of the syntactic complexity of readings when considering background knowledge in a study with high school Spanish students who had been leaning the language for 3-4 years. The results of their study showed that the learners were able to recall more when the syntactic level of the readings on the Incas they were exposed to was low. They concluded from their findings that because of the students' competency level in the language, they were not ready to process complex sentences effectively to aid in their comprehension. They further concluded that when exposing learners to specific cultural topics, instructors should make use of more reading strategies, which should help the learners process more complex language structures and aid in their comprehension.

Some of the pedagogical techniques recommended by Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) are important to consider to help novice learners approach the text, for example, setting the scene with the students about the text they are about to approach. Moreover, Krashen (1981) suggested limiting the reading, especially with beginner students, by presenting texts that are restricted to

one single topic and author. In addition, texts that use the repetition of structures and vocabulary as well as local settings are better for novice learners.

### **Pedagogical Considerations/Advantages of the Written Language**

One pedagogical tool that can be used when teaching reading and writing in another language is the language proper. According to Brown (2007) there are at least six differences between spoken and written language that should be considered when students are becoming literate in another language. First, students should be made aware that the written language has some advantages over the spoken language; for example, spoken language is not permanent, whereas written language is. Once a sentence is uttered, it vanishes unless recorded. Yet a reader always has the opportunity to go back to what is written. Second, the reader is able to read at their own speed. This is especially significant for beginning students when they are familiarizing themselves with the foreign language. Third, spoken language requires the processing of a number of features such as phonemes, rhythm, intonation, pauses, voice, and stress that written language does not have. In written language there are only written graphemes as opposed to all the features present in spoken language, and this is an advantage for the reader. Fourth, writing and speech represent different modes of complexity, and the most prominent feature is in the use of clauses. The clauses in spoken language are shorter than those in written language. Fifth, although written language has greater variety than spoken language, the reader has more time to process new vocabulary and predict the meaning of new words; learners should refrain from the use of bilingual dictionaries, but should judge a word by its context. Sixth, there are rhetorical and organizational conventions in writing. For example, there are opening or closing paragraphs as well as comparison or contrasting conventions.

On the other hand, what might make the interpretation of a text difficult is the lack of context. A text was written at a certain time and in a certain place by a writer who is absent at the time of reading. Therefore, if the reader becomes familiar with these conventions, these will help in the interpretation of the text. Students exposed to readings in a foreign language will experience certain difficulties when confronted with a foreign text. Reminding them of some of the advantages written language has over spoken language might lower their anxiety.

### **Second Language and Foreign Language Research**

This section includes studies conducted in the SL and FL language classroom where one or two of the four skills were utilized to enhance either reading or writing. These studies are relevant because they contributed to the design and focus of the present study. First, the section explores ESL literary reading to enhance writing. Second, the section considers FL studies using speaking, listening, or reading to enhance writing. Finally, this section discusses three independent studies: a FL study that considered the effects of writing to enhance reading, a psycholinguistic study on reading comprehension to enhance text comprehension, and a study that analyzed the effects L1 skills have on L2 skills.

#### **ESL Studies on Literary Reading to Enhance Writing**

As far as studies conducted in ESL classrooms, Newell, Garriga, and Peterson (2001) explored how undergraduate ESL students responded to different texts. Text organization was considered together with the strategies students used to put their meaning forward in writing. The study was administered analyzing three essays each of 3 advanced international college students. The teacher's instruction was observed as she trained the students on the structure of the kind of writing they were supposed to accomplish at the end of the 10-week project. The students were also allowed to discuss ideas with the instructor as well as with their peers. Students were

interviewed individually on their views, perceptions, and reactions to the assignments and instructions, and the conclusions of the study were relevant as far as the development of writing ability is concerned. The students were trained to “employ more academic thinking and reasoning strategies” (Newell et al., 2001, p. 180). Therefore, the learners were able to develop their essays successfully, organize them and enlarge “their current understandings of what it means to write analytically in the academy” (p. 180). They concluded then that the goal of ESL composition courses should be to train students to use the principles of writing taught in other disciplines.

Hirvela (2005) also conducted two case studies of L2 writers. These students were both Korean undergraduate students; one was studying nursing and the other architecture. He had observed that ESL students made use of computers beyond their writing courses, and computer use had not received much attention among instructors. Therefore, the goal of his study was to research how much computer-based writing the students performed outside their ESL writing classes. He also wondered then what should be taught in ESL writing classes to help students engage better in writing tasks across their curriculum. Furthermore, he speculated as to whether professionals outside ESL courses should be responsible for teaching students how to use a computer to do their assigned work. The students were observed during one semester at a research university. The students answered a questionnaire at the beginning of the study and then met with the researcher weekly and their answers were reviewed. They also asked questions related to their use of the computer, reading comprehension material, and writing tasks. It was concluded from the study that International undergraduate students’ needs as far as writing cannot be met only in ESL classes. Disciplinary faculty should then work in conjunction with ESL teachers to help these students meet their needs. Therefore, teachers would be helping the

learners to develop critical thinking. In other words, they would be helping the students to elaborate their judgment to apply what they learn in one class to other disciplines; the instructors would also be able to understand the specific goals these students need to meet in their classes.

In addition, Campbell (1987) explored the process of writing of native and non-native students and concluded that reading gives the students a sense of confidence that is later observed in their writing, in that their writings have an “authority” that is not observed in the writings of poor readers. Therefore, the texts produced by the latter do not reach the standards required by the instructors.

### **FL Studies Using Speaking and Listening to Enhance Writing**

As far as the FL studies using other skills to enhance writing, Stokes (2007) conducted a project with two groups of beginner Spanish students at the college level. Through this project the students’ limited knowledge of the language was activated either through brainstorming ideas in class or contacting their instructor through e-mail if they had any doubts or questions. The students were expected to write one paragraph every 10 to 14 days of the 10-paragraph paper due by the end of the semester. The instructor analyzed the topics presented in the students’ textbook that were to be taught throughout the course and made a list of general topics that each paragraph in the paper had to include. As students completed the paragraphs, they would turn them in to the instructor. The paragraphs were corrected, and the students would have to go over the corrections, which could be related to language, organization, content, or vocabulary. When they turned in a new paragraph, they would also turn in the original paragraph with the marked corrections. Speaking was used as a way of enhancing students’ writing as they brainstormed ideas in class. Furthermore, the project proved to be meaningful and motivating to students, as a

context was provided to them, and they were able to improve their writing ability by learning how to self-edit their work.

In contrast, there was a listening-to-write study conducted by Pino-Silva (2007) in Venezuela. This study was conducted to better the learning environment of 429 students at a high school in Caracas. Booths for computer and video recorders were set up; listening comprehension materials were to be used with the computers, videos, and TVs. Because listening comprehension was an essential part of the project, a great variety of activities were created. There were a number of video segments that were selected from English cable TV. Students were asked to watch a video segment of approximately 3 minutes; complete fill-in-the-blank, true/false, or multiple choice exercises to check comprehension of the chunk; and write a comment on the segment they had watched. There were three levels of proficiency: 1, 2, and 3. At Level 1 the students were asked to write a one-word comment; at Level 2, a sentence; and at Level 3, they were to write a short paragraph.

This study proved to be very significant in many respects. First, it helped students develop critical thinking when asked to write their reactions to the segment. Second, the students gained linguistic competence. It was reported by the teachers that students made fewer language errors than before doing the project, and so teachers were able to devote more time to the correction of organization and content. Third, it was also reported that these could be considered the first steps of students toward developing an argumentative essay.

### **FL Studies on Reading to Enhance Writing**

As opposed to studies that focused on other skills to enhance writing, Al-Jarf (2004) conducted a FL study on reading to enhance writing. Al-Jarf aimed at studying whether there were any differences in results between students who were exposed to in-class writing

instructions making use of the textbook only and those who used a combination of Web-based and class instructions. The students were Freshman FL students attending an American college. All the students used the same textbook, but the experimental group could make use of a Web-board where discussions were started. The students could respond by sending e-cards or group messages. They responded to other students' threads, and posted poems, stories, or comments. The students could e-mail the instructor asking questions. They could also use the Internet to locate information that appeared in the book. The pretest given to both groups showed that both groups had significant problems with spelling, punctuation, and organization, yet the results of the pretest of the control group were better than the results of the experimental group. However, the results of the study showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. The use of the Web-based instruction had a positive effect on the students' writing ability, as it motivated them. Furthermore, the study helped the students change their attitude toward writing.

The study described previously was relevant as the students interacted among themselves and with the instructor as well. In the current research the participants interacted with the text, guided by the activities they had to work on. The predicted result was that the project would have a positive effect on text organization and content in their writings.

Pérez-Sotelo and González-Bueno (2003) also conducted a study using an experimental and a control group with students in their first semester of Spanish at an American college. The control group wrote weekly journals using paper and pencil, whereas the experimental group used e-mail. They could write about any topic that they liked. The instructors, who were the researchers, wrote comments on the writings of both groups, referring more to content than to errors. As far as correction was concerned, "the instructor's model acted as models of accurate language, so grammatical corrective feedback was provided automatically" (p. 871). The results

of the study showed that the control group outperformed the experimental group on grammatical accuracy. The researchers concluded that perhaps the use of e-mail to perform the task motivated students more, yet it did not help them make fewer grammatical errors.

Additionally, Shang (2007) conducted a study investigating the efficacy of the use of e-mail to enhance the students' writing performance. The participants were 40 nontraditional intermediate English students at a university in Taiwan. Nontraditional students in Taiwan are learners who are a bit older, ages ranging between 23 and 50 ( $m = 32$ ), with more work and social experience. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used. First, the participants had to read texts on various topics in class and then had to exchange ideas to gain further comprehension of the texts with another participant. The results of the quantitative study indicated that the participants showed a significant improvement with regard to sentence complexity but not with grammatical errors or density of vocabulary use. Second, the participants' perceptions of the impact of e-mail exchanges was positive overall, stating that they had fun and could discuss their ideas with peers because by doing so they could learn grammar and vocabulary. Some, however, pointed out they did not have enough time and preferred face-to-face discussions. Moreover, some students reported that they had enjoyed the e-mail project as they had improved their computer skills. Some even expressed that the electronic medium lowered their anxiety by making learning fun and authentic. The use of an authentic medium and material is essential to making learning motivating and challenging to students so that they see the real use of communicative activities.

In another computer-related study, Smith (1990) conducted a study with fourth-semester Spanish students who worked with different computer-based writing tools. One group used a computer-conferencing system and the other a word-processing program. The experimental

group, which used the conferencing system, exchanged ideas as well as helped others in the group with their writing activities. All messages sent could be read by all other members in the group so they were able to interact constantly and engage in conversations. The control group, who used the word-processing program, just worked on their writings and focused more on accuracy than the experimental group, who focused more on meaning. The experimental group spent an average of 3 hours per week in online discussions, whereas the control group spent an average of 90 minutes a week. The results show that the students in the control group improved their grammatical accuracy significantly, whereas the experimental group improved their reading and writing abilities. In conclusion, it is recommended that a combination of activities be used, that is, activities directed at meaning and creativity, as well as form, so that the writing ability is enhanced.

Ruiz-Funes (1999) conducted two studies with similar characteristics in 1994 and 1996. She explored the process of reading-to-writing employed by proficient FL learners of Spanish. She examined the different processes used by the Spanish students when composing their writing, such as planning, writing, reviewing, and editing. Among the different processes she analyzed were that of synthesizing, which referred to how students planned and organized ideas; monitoring, that is, how students checked accuracy; structuring, which described the way the learners selected relevant information; and elaborating, which was related to using their creativity. The findings showed that students were aware of these processes, in particular elaboration, because they were able to integrate the information from the literary readings into their own ideas for writing.

In addition, Lee and Riley (1990) conducted a study with foreign language readers to examine the effects that text adjuncts as rhetorical structures had on reading comprehension.

Text adjuncts are the titles, introductory statements, or pictures that appear in the passage that might facilitate the students' comprehension of the reading. They conducted their study in a French FL class. The study examined "the effects of providing readers with a pre-reading, rhetorically-oriented framework as a text adjunct for the purpose of facilitating comprehension" (p. 27). Two passages written for novice non-native speakers of the language were selected. The students were randomly selected to be in one of the three different conditions: passages with no framework, minimal framework, or expanded framework. The group with no framework proceeded directly to the passage. The second group was presented with a short framework or explanation, and the third group was given the most detailed framework. The text adjuncts were written in the students' native language, and the students were allowed to write their recalls using their native language. The results of the study showed that providing an expanded rhetorical framework as a text adjunct enhanced comprehension of the text for foreign language beginner students. Furthermore, the study also indicated that providing students with a structural organization of the passage enhanced their writing and organization. This particular study indicates that if the framework is presented in the students' native language, it facilitates comprehension. It is the researcher's intention to use the same framework for the students' instructions in the present project. Furthermore, the authentic texts used will be organized so that these help the students put their ideas together easily.

Similarly, Asenciór (2006) conducted a study that examined the ability of college level, novice foreign language learners of Spanish to summarize and how this ability related to the rhetorical organization of the text, the participants' reading and writing abilities in the L1, and their achievements in the target language. The 31 participants in this study ranged in age from 18 to 50. They summarized two texts whose topics they had discussed in class the previous

semester. The first text's rhetorical organization was comparison and contrast, and the second text was a description. The results of the study indicate that there was no effect of rhetorical organization of the text on summary quality. Moreover, the participants' L1 literacy ability did not seem to be related to the quality of their summary. However, there was a weak relationship found between academic second-language achievement and ability to summarize.

The results of the study showed no relationship between rhetorical organization of the text or L1 reading and writing ability in summary quality because the summary writers had low L2 proficiency. On the one hand, it was speculated that the participants had difficulty getting the main ideas of the texts, as the syntax and lexis were above their level of comprehension, and therefore they could not take advantage of their background knowledge. On the other hand, it was speculated that because the subjects were familiar with the topic, they were not motivated, and, therefore, paid no attention to the rhetorical organization when summarizing. Furthermore, the relationship found between their academic achievement and summary quality added little evidence to support that proficiency was a relevant factor in summary ability. As can be seen, it is necessary to carefully select the topic of the texts and their degree of difficulty so that the students feel encouraged and motivated to use their background knowledge.

Another study by Lee (1986a) examined the students' use of a title and picture page to induce the correct schemata. The students were presented with two types of texts, one with a familiar topic and another with an unfamiliar topic. The results of the study showed that the use of a framework as a prereading activity helped enhance the comprehension of the familiar topic but not of the unfamiliar one. Considering the fact that the students in the present project are novice learners, Lee's study suggests that it is important to select familiar topics that have text adjuncts so as to facilitate comprehension of the passages.

A third study by Lee (2002) examined the acquisition of new vocabulary words and forms together with text comprehension in L2 readers. He based his study learners' ability to comprehend a word's meanings without formal knowledge of its form. He worked with beginner students who had never studied the future form of Spanish verbs. One of the research questions addressed in the study referred to the frequency with which learners are exposed to forms and whether this affects comprehension and input processing; another question asked, if students are oriented to pay attention to form and meaning, does this help their input process and text comprehension? The results of the study showed a significant effect for input frequency. Moreover, the learners who were oriented with additional vocabulary words improved their form intake. The present research addresses the students' use of vocabulary words. Therefore, when choosing the passages, the frequency with which words appeared should ideally be considered to help the learners' uptake of forms and new vocabulary.

### **FL Studies on the Effects of Writing to Measure Reading**

Zuckermann (1987) examined the effect of writing activities on the teaching of reading to students of English as a FL. Specifically, it studied the impact the training of sentence organization, sentence analysis, sentence paraphrase, sentence combination, and sentence composition had on the reading comprehension skills of 120 Israeli students studying English as an FL. The participants were studying English at the lower or upper intermediate level. They all had studied English previously either at Elementary or High School level. The experimental group was trained in sentence organizing, sentence analyzing, sentence combining, sentence paraphrasing, and sentence composing; the control group was not. All the writing activities were related to the reading comprehension texts being studied. The study lasted 4 months, and the

students were tested 39 times; 32 activities were selected for analysis. The reading comprehension activities were on vocabulary, comprehension, or sentence related.

The results of the study show that the training that the experimental group received reflected positively on the reading comprehension of students because they outperformed the students in the control group. The weaker students improved more than the stronger ones. However, statistical analysis indicates that the impact of this training was not as great on the grasping of details as on the general gist of ideas. Yet the general findings in this study support the hypothesis that writing exercises at the sentence level have an impact on the reading comprehension of students in a foreign language.

Lee (1986b) conducted a study that used a recall task to measure L2 reading comprehension. There were a total of 320 students from Levels 1 to 4 of the target language, which was Spanish, with Level 4 being the most advanced. The study took place during four semesters. The directions were given in English, which was the participants' native language. Some participants were asked to recall in their L1 given directions, and others were asked to recall using their L2 with or without directions. There were significant effects found in this study: Those writing in their L1 recalled more than those writing in their L2. However, whether or not the participants were given directions orienting them into recalling was not significant. Furthermore, the triple interaction language of recall x directions x level was not significant. The significant interaction was directions x level. Levels 1 to 4 performed better when they were not told that they would be recalling a passage. On the other hand, Levels 2 and 3 performed better when they were told they would be recalling.

The most significant finding of this study was that the participants' level of comprehension increased when asked to recall using their native language. This finding was

taken into consideration when designing the comprehension questions in the present study, which were intended to evaluate students' comprehension of the authentic texts to which they were exposed before the writing assignments.

### **A Psycholinguistics Study on Reading Comprehension to Enhance Text Comprehension**

Lee (1990) conducted another study in which he studied the constructive processes in early stage non-native readers of Spanish in comprehending explanatory texts. He analyzed how Bernhardt's model for constructive processes in comprehension could apply to beginner students as she had only analyzed its effects on advanced students and never on Spanish students. This study embodied a schema-theoretic approach to reading. The students were exposed to a reading that was beyond their level of understanding, for example, "El Feudalismo" (Feudalism), and they were asked to recall what they read. The results were analyzed examining text-based and extra text-based components. The three text-based components were the following: word recognition, referred to as the attachment of a semantic value; phonemic/graphemic decoding, based on the recognition of words visually and phonetically; and syntactic feature recognition, based on the relationship between words. Extra text-based components included the following: intratextual perception, defined as the relation that exists between each part of the text; prior knowledge, which is related to his or her background knowledge of the subject matter; and metacognition, which relates to whether or not the reader is thinking about what he or she is reading.

The results of the study show that the students' knowledge of Feudalism was incomplete, and they assimilated new information by using the background knowledge they had on the subject. In other words, the new information did not modify their knowledge, and

misunderstandings took place. Therefore, in order to build up beginner students' understanding of a passage, there should be a connection between both text-based and extra text-based factors.

In this psycholinguistic study, it is interesting to see how the students tended to assimilate the information of a text according to their background knowledge. Although it was necessary in this study to have a mismatch between input and output in order to do the study, it is important to bear in mind the match that should exist between passage selection and students' knowledge of the language in order to aid the learners in their understanding of the text and building of the language. This is taken as an important point in the present study in regard to selecting the participants' readings.

### **A Study on the Effects of First Language Literacy Skills on Second Language Literacy Skills**

As far as the effects of L1 literacy skills on L2 literacy skills, a study conducted by Watkins-Mace (2006) examined the aforementioned for native Spanish and native English speakers. Students from two different high schools participated in the study. Forty-eight subjects whose native language was English volunteered to participate, and 48 subjects also volunteered to participate whose native language was Spanish. The participants' backgrounds were also different. The native speakers of English had all studied English in a formal setting and reported learning Spanish in high school. The native Spanish speakers were all learning English. Some had studied abroad in their home countries, some were just starting to learn it, and others had heard the language at home.

The researcher used the reading proficiency test in English and Spanish. The reading test assessed vocabulary, vocabulary in context, reading for understanding, reading for life skills, and language usage. The writing test assessed the subjects' ability to communicate in the foreign

language according to their level. It examined punctuation, capitalization, and their ability to write a story based on pictures. The participants were asked to take both tests and to complete a questionnaire answering questions about sex, age, number of years studying the language, and the like. The results indicated that there was a positive relationship between L1 literacy skills and L2 literacy skills.

### **Description of the Problem**

Although there have been numerous studies conducted about reading-to-writing relations, there are still many gaps to be explored. Many researchers focused on how reading helps students develop their critical thinking and their writing style, or how ESL writing classes can work in conjunction with other disciplines. Others findings showed how reading aids novice students to be more fluent writers through the use of computers and how computers motivate students. Others researched the enhancement of writing skills through the use of speaking and listening activities with foreign language beginners and false beginner learners. Through these studies, it was observed that the students' grammatical errors decreased, and therefore the teachers were able to pay more attention to the areas of text organization and content in assessing and guiding the students. Other research examined how first language literacy effected second language literacy, how reading comprehension enhanced text comprehension, and how writing enhanced reading. Furthermore, there were others who conducted studies on literary reading-to-writing relations that examined the process of writing of Spanish FL students. Yet there were no studies found that addressed authentic, nonliterary reading used to enhance writing.

In order to understand the focus of this study, it is important to be aware of the importance of authenticity and its role in the language classroom. Cook (2001) made a distinction between authentic and nonauthentic language. He asserted that nonauthentic language

is especially designed for teaching purposes. Language for teaching purposes is simplified for the students and generally unnatural, as people in real-life situation do not speak in full grammatical sentences, for example. In real-life situations, there is not even a clear shift of turns when people speak; furthermore, there is hesitation and interruption. He further established that until recently there was a belief that nonauthentic language was necessary in the foreign language classroom. However, with the advent of methods that started paying more attention to the situations the students might encounter in real life, there was a shift in language teaching. Exercises and activities used in class moved away from the language created for the language class, and the language presented to students was that used by native speakers in everyday life. Not only the oral language presented to the learners needed to be language used by native speakers, but also the texts, such as newspapers articles, e-mails, magazines, and many other sources.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Omaggio Hadley (2001) defined authentic materials as “those that were intended for use by native speakers of the language and are thus not tailored to a particular language-learning curriculum” (p. 140). She further suggested that teachers should take time to select and evaluate the right authentic material they want to use with their students as they should bear in mind their language level and prepare activities and tasks for them to work on using those materials. In addition, Rings (1986) alleged that most scholars agree that the use of authentic material in the foreign language classroom is essential and vital.

On the other hand, Rings (1986) discussed the idea of authentic oral and written language as well as the situations in which they take place. She stated that a distinction should be made between the function of oral authentic language and written authentic language in the foreign language class. She quoted a number of scholars in her discussion of the meaning of authenticity. She referred to Löschmann and Löschmann (1985) who, in order to define authenticity, stated

that the speaker as well as the writer should be native, and the language produced in these texts is directly linked to the speaker or writer knowledge and perspective. Moreover, she referred to what Weijenberg (1980) maintained as far as the authenticity of the language is concerned:

Authenticity depends very much on the situation in which language is produced. In an authentic language situation, the native speakers are the only accepted speakers, and they do not concentrate on form when speaking but on the goal of the conversation. A true authentic language situation is when native speakers engage in conversation, and they are not recorded.

Weijenberg (1980) further affirmed that when the participants know that they are being recorded the conversation is less authentic, and the least authentic of all would be role play. However, Weijenberg alleged that a certain type of standard should be set in order to create authentic material for students. Furthermore, authentic language many times is “incorrect,” and this should be considered, and students should be made aware of the incorrectness. The differences that exist between spoken and written language should be considered. Grammatical mistakes, for example, are generally present in actual speech, whereas full forms are found in written language, and, as a result, language sounds more unfamiliar. Finally, she recommended the use of authentic texts with beginner students from the beginning of the semester, but they should be introduced with supportive material, such as pre- and post-activities. The teacher should act as the facilitator to bridge the gap that exists between the difficulty of the text and the students’ level of comprehension.

Breen (1985) referred to authenticity as those activities used in the language classroom where students learn how to communicate. Widdowson (1990), however, referred to Breen’s (1985) conclusion of authenticity by stating that authenticity in the language classroom can be anything that takes place in the class including drilling or verb conjugations because these

activities may be aiding the students' learning. Kramsch (1993) concluded that "all pedagogy is an artifact of educational discourse" (p. 184) and agreed with Widdowson that "inauthentic language-using behavior may well be *effective* language-learning behavior". She further asserted that what goes on in the language classroom should be in line with the "communicative and cognitive goals accepted as appropriate in a particular educational context".

In addition, Taylor (1994) argued that we should not be interested in referring to authenticity as an abstract concept, but rather as a practical concept of fitness to the learning purpose. Similarly, Widdowson (1979) pointed out the following:

It is probably better to consider authenticity not as a quality residing in instances of language but as a quality which is bestowed upon them, created by the response of the receiver. Authenticity in this view is a function of the interaction between the reader/hearer and the text which incorporates the intentions of the writer/speaker....Authenticity has to do with appropriate response. (p. 166)

Then (Kramsch, 1993) concluded by saying, "The teacher's task is precisely to give the learner the means of properly authenticating a text" (p. 179). Therefore, by making use of reading comprehension texts, it is the researcher's intention to authenticate the students' responses by enhancing their writing ability as far as text organization and content are concerned.

However, the idea of authenticity discussed by Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland, and Warschauer (2003) is not linked to any of the previously mentioned ideas. Matsuda et al.'s (2003) concept of multiliteracies incorporates a new idea of authenticity. They defined it as "new ways of reading and writing that involve a mixture of modalities, symbol systems and languages" (p. 156). Matsuda et al. stated that with the advent of the new era of technologies, Internet, advances in travel, news media, globalization, borderless cultures, and languages, it is possible to move between different discourses every day. Therefore, they referred to "hybrid texts" (p. 157) that might include different views brought from different communities, as

discourses nowadays alternate constantly. Consequently, it is fair to say that authenticity can be viewed from many different perspectives that add innovative and alternative considerations to the traditional definitions.

On the other hand, Omaggio Hadley (2001) stated the following regarding the development of beginning students' writing skills:

*Writing* might best be viewed as a continuum of activities that range from the more mechanical or formal aspects of "writing down" on the one end to the more complex act of composing on the other. This seems most sensible in a context of foreign language learning, where beginning language students must first struggle with the transcription of speech before they can engage in more complex forms of written expression. (p. 281)

Therefore, in the present research the experimental group was exposed to authentic language through the reading comprehension activity; the point was to examine whether these readings helped them improve "the act of composing," which, according to Omaggio Hadley (2001), comes later in their writing process at this level. The experimental group had to pay attention not only to the mechanics but also to the act of composing, because the researcher explored the organization and content of their writing, not their use of grammar. On the other hand, the control group only had to follow the task of the writing assignment, just as the experimental group did after completing the reading activity. It was the researcher's intention to examine how the use of an authentic text contributed to the participants' "act of composing" (Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 281), being that they were beginner students.

In sum, there are several points to consider from the previous studies as they enrich the present study. The readings chosen should facilitate interaction between the reader and the text so as to enhance comprehension. The use of the participants' native language in the activity instructions is important to aid the learners in text comprehension. The readings selected should be organized, as text organization guides students' organization of ideas. The topics of the

selected readings should be familiar to the students and should be accompanied by text adjuncts such as titles, title statements, or pictures to facilitate comprehension. As far as vocabulary words are concerned, input frequency of words should be considered when selecting the passages to help the participants' uptake of the forms and new vocabulary words. Given that, on the one hand, there is a positive relationship between L1 literacy skills and L2 literacy skills, and, on the other, the learners' native language exerts a strong influence when learning a target language, students should be encouraged to think in the target language to minimize interference (Brown, 2007). Insights gained from the results of the studies reviewed in this chapter aided the researcher in designing the present research study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

After reading and analyzing many studies conducted on “reading to writing,” this researcher found no studies that examined the effects of prior exposure to an authentic reading on the writing ability of beginner-level students. The researcher decided to examine whether the exposure to authentic texts affected beginning students’ writing, and if so whether this exposure had a positive effect in helping the learners develop content, vocabulary use, and text organization to ultimately raise their linguistic level. Furthermore, focusing on novice levels was the best opportunity to observe students who were least likely to have been exposed to authentic texts. This study expected to offer results and conclusions that would be useful to future researchers for reading-to-writing relations at beginner levels in the foreign language classroom and to general studies toward the development of these skills.

The following chapter is organized in terms of the participants who were utilized in the present study. Second, it presents a thorough description of the research method. Finally, it discusses how the data was collected and analyzed.

#### **Participants**

The main study utilized the researcher’s two university classes of novice-level students. These students either had no prior experience with the foreign language or had not taken the language in the last 4 years. Classes at the beginning level have a maximum of 25 students per class. There were 22 participants in the experimental group and 21 in the control group in the main study at the beginning of the semester. The researcher had to discard the data of 4 students

from each group who were not following the instructions they had originally agreed to follow. So out of the  $N = 36$ , 18 were in the experimental group, and 17 in the control group.

The Placement Requirements form (Appendix E) was used to determine whether the students fit the criteria to attend a beginner's class. The form requires students to choose the box that best describes their experience with the target language. Subsequently the researcher interviewed each student from both groups individually to verify their language background. Students whom the researcher considered more advanced than the Spanish 101 level were asked to take the placement test offered by The Department of Modern Languages and Classics. After taking the placement test and bringing the results to the researcher, students were interviewed one last time by a third party (a Spanish language instructor) to ensure that they belonged in the class.

The groups comprised true beginner and false beginner students. As mentioned in chapter 2, a true beginner language proficiency is characterized by the use of “a few memorized words or phrases, with little or no syntactic variation beyond the scope of prefabricated, familiar material at their disposal” (Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 16). On the other hand, the false beginner language proficiency is described as presenting some characteristics of an intermediate level “simple sentences or phrases, normally limited to the present time” (p. 17) and the language is “quite inaccurate” (Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 17).

The *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012* for reading and writing describe the novice students in these terms as shown in Table 1. These guidelines outline what students can understand and do when reading and writing at the different levels of language learning.

Table 1

*ACTFL Levels for Reading and Writing*

| Skill/Level                   | Description  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Reading<br><i>Novice High</i> | At the Novice High sublevel, readers can understand, fully and with relative ease, key words and cognates, as well as formulaic phrases across a range of highly contextualized texts. Where vocabulary has been learned, they can understand predictable language and messages such as those found on train schedules, roadmaps, and street signs. Readers at the Novice High sublevel are typically able to derive meaning from short, noncomplex texts that convey basic information for which there is contextual or extralinguistic support   |
| <i>Novice Mid</i>             | At the Novice Mid sublevel, readers are able to recognize the letters or symbols of an alphabetic or syllabic writing system or a limited number of characters in a character-based language. They can identify a number of highly contextualized words and phrases including cognates and borrowed words but rarely understand material that exceeds a single phrase. Rereading is often required.  |
| <i>Novice Low</i>             | At the Novice Low sublevel, readers are able to recognize a limited numbers of letters, symbols, and characters. They are occasionally able to identify high-frequency words and/or phrases when strongly supported by context (SOURCE?, p.24)   |
| Writing<br><i>Novice High</i> | Writers at the Novice High sublevel are able to meet limited basic practical writing needs using lists, short messages, postcards, and simple notes. They are able to express themselves within the context in which the language was learned. Relying mainly on practiced material. Their writing is focused on common elements of daily life. Novice high writers are able to recombine learned vocabulary and structure to create simple sentences on very familiar topics, but are not able to sustain sentence-level writing all the time. Due to inadequate vocabulary and/or grammar, writing at this level may only partially communicate the intentions of the writer. Novice High writing is often comprehensible to natives used to the writings of non-natives, but gaps in comprehension may occur. |
| <i>Novice Mid</i>             | Writers at the Novice Mid sublevel can reproduce from memory a modest number of words and phrases in context. They can supply limited information on simple forms and documents, and other basic biographical information, such as names, numbers, and nationality. Novice Mid writers exhibit a high degree of accuracy when writing on well-practiced, familiar topics using limited formulaic language. With less familiar topics, there is a marked decrease in accuracy. Errors in spelling or the representation of symbols may be frequent. There is little evidence of functional writing skills. At this level writing may be difficult to understand even by those accustomed to non-native writing.   |
| <i>Novice Low</i>             | Writers at the Novice Low sublevel are able to copy or transcribe familiar words or phrases, forms letters in an alphabetic system, and copy and produce isolated, basic strokes in languages that use syllabaries or characters. Given adequate time and familiar cues, they can produce from memory a very limited number of isolated words or familiar phrases, but errors are to be expected (ACTFL, 2012).  |

*Note.* ACTFL, 2012

Considering the description in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for novice students, the present study on reading-to-writing relations provided comprehensible authentic input to beginning students, helped students develop literacy in the L2, and provided data on the effect of reading on students who had never been exposed to authentic readings. Due to the frequent exposure to authentic reading texts related to their writing topic, and because reading was “a source of comprehensible input” (Omaggio Hadley, 2001), at the end of the present study it was expected that the students in the experimental group would be able to make use of more vocabulary words and cognates, which would help them to better develop content, as well as to better organize their writing.

Moreover, the learners at the novice level want to be able to read and write in a particular language, that is to say, to become literate in a target language. As Auerbach (1996) indicated, literacy “is more than just a set of discrete, mechanical skills or functional competencies” (p. xv). As far as literacy training in a second language is concerned, Brown (1994) stated that “literacy programs are designed to teach students whose native language reading/writing skills are either non-existent or very poor” (p. 128). These students are trying to become literate in Spanish as well as learn to speak the language. Consequently, the Spanish 101 level was chosen as a way to examine the effects of exposure to authentic texts on novice students’ writing, in other words, on the writing of students who had little or no exposure to authentic material in the target language. This study also aimed to help beginner learners develop strategies to derive meaning from different kinds of readings and to prepare them for the act of composing (Brown, 2007, as well as to review and practice what was taught in the classroom. As Omaggio Hadley (2001) stated, “writing down” can be a very difficult task for beginner students, and it should support what is

learned in the classroom. However, assignments should “present language in the context of full discourse so that students learn how to write for communicative purposes” (p. 282).

### **Research Method**

This research was comprised of a pilot study and a main study. The pilot study, which was conducted in the Fall 2011 semester, utilized beginner students, divided into a control and an experimental group, and analyzed the effects the reading (or not reading) of authentic texts prior to writing had on the students’ content-vocabulary and text organization. There was no pretest or posttest.

The results of the pilot study revealed the following errors that had to be corrected in the main study. Because students did the reading and writing assignments at home, there was no reassurance that they completed the reading assignments according to the design of the study. Therefore, for the main study, participants completed the reading in the University computer lab with the rest of the class. Also, the point values on the writing rubric were changed to provide interval data instead of ordinal data so that better statistical measures could be utilized. Three raters were used in the pilot study, whereas that number was increased to four for the main study for better reliability. A posttest was added to the main study for comparison against the pretest that was used to compare linguistic ability of the two groups before initiating the investigation. Furthermore, to ensure reliability of the study the students were given a four-digit number to use as their ID number on their writings instead of a two-digit number as they used in the pilot study. Additionally, although the quantitative study in the pilot study presented a number of flaws that needed to be improved in the main study, the qualitative study that measured the students’ perception towards the study was highly favorable in all the items by all the participants. This

shows that the students found that the study aided their writing as far as content, vocabulary, and text organization and that the students had a positive attitude towards the study in general.

The main study took place in the Spring 2012 semester and was quasi-experimental. Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2006) defined experimental research as “a study of the effect of the systematic manipulation of one variable(s) over another variable” (p. 26). On the other hand, this study is *quasi*-experimental because the groups used for the study were already “assembled groups” (p. 26). The experimenter could not randomly assign the participants to either the experimental or control group, as these groups were designated classes at the university. Therefore, the researcher had to use “intact groups” (p. 278), that is, “preeexisting groups” to run both studies—the pilot as well as the main study.

One of the classes was the control group and the other one was the experimental group in this study. Students at the 101 level of Spanish at the university were required to write six short writings (Escrituras) throughout the semester. These were to be turned in at the end of each unit. The Spanish 101 course used the textbook *Tú Dirás!*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, which covered the first six units of the text. Each unit contained related topics, vocabulary words, and grammatical points. The topics and guides for the writing assignments were housed in university’s course-management system (eLearning), as devised by the Spanish Language Program.

The researcher gave both groups the same instructions regarding the format they were to follow in their writing assignments: a paragraph of no more than eight to ten lines, font 12, Times Roman. Each student was assigned a four-digit number that they used when they turned in their compositions to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The students in the control group and the experimental group were asked to write the six required written assignments and follow

the instructions the researcher gave at the beginning of the course. Additionally, the experimental group was asked to read a text related to the written topic before writing the assignment.

Reading (or not reading) one of the four different authentic texts before Writing Assignments 2 to 5 was the independent variable (IV) in the present study. However, there were three dependent variables (DV). The researcher compared the gains of the experimental and the control groups in terms of “overall writing skills” (DV 1) between Writing Assignment 1 (pretest) and Writing Assignment 6 (posttest). Similarly, detailed grades for two aspects of writing—the combined “content and vocabulary” (DV 2) and “text organization” (DV 3)—were available only for Writing Assignments 2 to 5.

The first composition assigned to the students was considered the pretest, and the researcher and three other raters used these grades to establish the base linguistic levels of both groups. No authentic reading preceded the pretest. The pretest helped the researcher determine whether there was a difference as far as language proficiency between the groups before the treatment began. The data were used for comparison when analyzing the final results of the study.

For Writing Assignments 2 to 5, the treatment consisted of having the experimental group read a short authentic text before writing the required paragraphs. After the reading, students answered multiple choice questions regarding content, vocabulary, and text organization that referred to the reading (Appendix B) in order to raise the students’ awareness to writing development in the target language. The last reading included two additional true/false statements to test comprehension because the reading was at a higher level of difficulty and to counteract the testing effect (see Appendix B). The researcher then reviewed the answers with the students to verify their understanding of the text.

In order to familiarize the students with the type of activities and texts they would be exposed to, the experimental group had a preliminary reading of an authentic text in class guided by the researcher so that they knew what to do with the readings during the actual treatment. For the next four class meetings the experimental group met in the language lab. Each of these four meetings took place one class before a writing assignment was due and the participants were asked to read an authentic text. Each of the written assignments 2-5 was corrected with the use of a rubric on content/vocabulary and text organization that was created by the researcher based on the rubric provided by the Basic Spanish Language Program (Appendices C and D).

For writing assignment 6, both groups were asked to write the assignment following the guide housed in eLearning. Writing Assignment 6 was considered the posttest, with the researcher and the three other raters focusing on the linguistic level of the participants. This determined if the intervention had any effect on the linguistic level of the experimental group by comparing the results with the data from the pretest to see whether or not there had been any significant improvement in the experimental group. The organization of the activities for the experimental and control groups are reviewed in Tables 2 and 3. At the end of the study the intervention group was given a survey asking them about their experience with the study.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The department's *Evaluation Criteria for Writing Activities* (Appendix C) was adapted for use in evaluating the students' assignments. Due to the students' limited language competence at the beginning level and in order to draw the students' attention to the use of vocabulary, the researcher decided to include some vocabulary features within the content area to raise their awareness on its use.

Table 2

*Organization of Activities for the Experimental Group*

| Text Chapter                      | Treatment<br>Authentic Reading Topic<br>Prior to Writing | Writing Topic                    |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Preliminary Chapter/<br>Chapter 1 | Pretest (no reading)                                     | Esc 1 “La vida del estudiante”   |
| Chapter 2                         | <i>La familia Simpson</i>                                | Esc 2 “Autoretrato y la familia” |
| Chapter 3                         | <i>Turismo Entre Ríos</i>                                | Esc 3 “Conociendo el pueblo...”  |
| Chapter 4                         | <i>Mis vacaciones favoritas</i>                          | Esc 4 “Mis vacaciones ideales”   |
| Chapter 5                         | <i>Relatos de viajeros</i>                               | Esc 5 “Mis últimas vacaciones”   |
| Chapter 6                         | Posttest (no reading)                                    | Esc 6 “La fiesta más divertida”  |

Table 3

*Organization of Activities for the Control Group*

| Text Chapter                      | Writing Topics                   |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Preliminary Chapter/<br>Chapter 1 | Esc 1 “La vida del estudiante”   |
| Chapter 2                         | Esc 2 “Autoretrato y la familia” |
| Chapter 3                         | Esc 3 “Conociendo el pueblo...”  |
| Chapter 4                         | Esc 4 “Mis vacaciones ideales”   |
| Chapter 5                         | Esc 5 “Mis últimas vacaciones”   |
| Chapter 6                         | Esc 6 “La fiesta más divertida”  |

The students' writing assignments were graded, and the designated instrument (Appendix D) was used to assign grades to the compositions of the experimental and control groups. Each group completed four writing assignments—Escrituras 2 through 5—in addition to Escrituras 1 and 6 (which were considered the pre- and posttest and contained an additional component). Each letter grade was represented by a set of numbers and followed by a short description of what they represented. Content was worth 30 points and Organization 25 points. Each rater chose then the numerical value from the number range that corresponded to the letter grade selected to each student's writing assignment. Afterward, the number scores were calculated to measure the student's improvement.

Three evaluators who were familiar with the grading rubric reviewed the researcher's corrections. If the researcher did not agree with the evaluator's correction, the evaluators and the researcher discussed these differences and reached an agreement. The researcher as well as the evaluators used this rubric when correcting the six writing assignments.

Three levels of analysis were used in this study to determine if there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. In this way, the study used a mixed-methods design. The primary research question of the study was whether there was a significant improvement in the experimental group's writing due to the intervention. The first method was a two-way mixed ANOVA. The researcher analyzed the gains of the experimental and the control groups in terms of overall writing skills (DV1). The second method was a MANOVA. The availability of detailed scores for combined content and vocabulary (DV 2) and text organization (DV 3) for Writing Assignments 2 to 5 made it possible to conduct a more detailed investigation of gains in those two aspects of writing. The third method was a qualitative survey administered to the experimental group at the end of the study to examine students' opinions of the study

(Appendix F). The survey was anonymous. The researcher predicted that the learners' attitudes toward the study would be positive because the reading activities would have enhanced their writing abilities. The Likert Scales (a summated rating scale) were used to assess their perceptions and opinions of the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This study examined the effects that authentic reading texts have on the writing of novice college Spanish students with a special focus on content, vocabulary, and organization. The following chapter is organized in terms of the research questions with their corresponding hypotheses. It presents the research design and the findings of the quantitative and qualitative research of the current study.

#### **Research Questions**

The study addressed the following research questions as noted in chapter 1:

Research Question 1: What is the impact that authentic reading comprehension activities have on novice students' overall writing abilities demonstrated on writing assignments?

Research Question 2: What is the impact that authentic reading comprehension activities have on the content/vocabulary development of students' writing assignments?

Research Question 3: What is the impact that authentic reading comprehension activities have on the organization of students' writing assignments?

Research Question 4: What are the students' perceptions of the reading comprehension activities to enhance students' writing assignments?

Based on the reviewed literature, the researcher hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve students' overall writing abilities demonstrated on writing assignments.

Hypothesis 2: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve the content/vocabulary of students' writing assignments.

Hypothesis 3: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve the organization of students' writing assignments.

Hypothesis 4: Students will perceive the authentic reading comprehension activities as helpful in improving their writing skills.

### **Research Design**

The researcher addressed the research questions using a mixed-methods research design as described in chapter 1 and 3. In order to answer the first three questions, the researcher conducted an experiment with ( $N = 36$ ) students enrolled in an introductory Spanish class (“novices”), randomly split into two groups of equal size: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group participated in four sessions of authentic-reading treatment prior to Writing Assignments 2 to 5. The control group had no reading assignments.

### **Experimental Treatment**

Prior to the experiment, the participants in the experimental group had a preliminary reading session in which the researcher explained and demonstrated what they were expected to do with the readings. During the experiment, the participants in the experimental group met with the researcher at the language lab prior to the dates when Writing Assignments 2 to 5 were due. At each of those four meetings, the participants were required to read a short authentic text and then answer some multiple-choice questions (Appendix B) regarding the content, vocabulary, and organization of the text they read. The purpose of the reading-related questionnaires was to elicit student thinking about each reading in terms of the learning objectives to be assessed through the subsequent writing assignments. The role of such a question-guided thinking process was to increase their awareness in the writing process.

### **Independent Variable and Dependent Variables**

The independent variable (IV) in the present study was reading (or not reading) one of the four different authentic texts before Writing Assignments 2 to 5. Also the gains of the experimental and the control groups were compared in terms of “overall writing skills” (DV 1)

between Writing Assignment 1 (pretest) and Writing Assignment 6 (posttest). Similarly, detailed grades for two aspects of writing—the combined “content and vocabulary” (DV 2) and “text organization” (DV 3)—were available only for Writing Assignments 2 to 5.

The same set of six writing assignments was administered to the experimental and control participants. All assignments were graded using the same rubric on content/vocabulary and text organization that was created by the researcher, which in turn was based on the rubric provided by the Basic Spanish Language Program (Appendices C). Pearson correlations among the scores given by the four graders were compared for overall writing skills (DV 1) at pretest and posttest (on assignments 1 and 6) along with the detailed scores for content-vocabulary (DV 2) and text organization (DV 3) on assignments 2 to 5, and the scores given on each test by the two graders who had the highest level of agreement (Pearson correlation values) were averaged into the final scores on that test. This procedure reduced the range of correlation coefficients among sets of grades per type of measure as follows: for pretest, .605 to .888; for posttest, .576 to .916; for content-vocabulary, .196 to .845; and for text organization, .371 to .778.

The overall writing scores on Writing Assignment 1 (i.e., the pretest, which had no prior authentic reading session for the experimental group) were used as baseline data. Gains in terms of overall writing skills were computed by deducting baseline scores from the final scores on Writing Assignment 6 (the posttest). The comparison between the gains of the experimental and the control groups in terms of overall writing skills was performed using ANOVA.

The availability of detailed scores for combined content and vocabulary (DV 2) and text organization (DV 3) for assignments 2 to 5 made it possible to conduct a more detailed investigation of gains in those two aspects of writing. A MANOVA that compared the performance of the experimental and control groups on Writing Assignment 2 (after just one

reading session) in terms of those two variables found no statistically significant differences.

Based on that finding, the researcher used content/vocabulary and organization scores on Writing Assignment 2 as baseline data, and the corresponding scores on Writing Assignment 5 (after the fourth and last reading session) as posttest data. The gains on these two variables were computed by deducting scores from Writing Assignment 2 from scores on Writing Assignment 5.

The data needed to answer Research Question 4 was collected through a survey administered to the experimental group at the end of the Spring 2012 semester. The survey collected quantitative and qualitative data.

In the next section the results are examined. First, the quantitative, or inferential statistics are discussed, and then the descriptive statistics. These are followed by the qualitative results, that is, the students' perceptions of the study.

## **Research Findings**

### **Quantitative Results**

Hypothesis 1: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve students' overall writing abilities demonstrated on writing assignments.

The analysis of variance that was used to test the first hypothesis considered gender as a possible independent variable in addition to the experimental reading treatment. There were 36 participants altogether from the experimental and control group. Of the 36 participants, 17 were in the control group: 11 females and 6 males; the remaining 18 belonged to the experimental group: 12 females and 6 males. The students' ages ranged from 18 to 28 in the experimental group and 19 to 24 in the control group.

In general, analyses of variance are very sensitive to missing cases, particularly when they involve comparisons of small groups, and/or when large proportions of the cases in a group have missing data. Table 4 shows the number of male and female cases with missing data by

writing assignment. The fact that the subgroup of male participants had more missing data, particularly in the experimental group, points to the highly tentative results for that particular subgroup.

Table 4

*Male and Female Cases with Missing Data by Writing Assignment*

| Writings                 | Missing Data in Writing Assignments |   |   |   |   |   |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
|                          | 1                                   | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| <b>Experimental</b>      |                                     |   |   |   |   |   |
| Females ( <i>n</i> = 12) | 0                                   | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Males ( <i>n</i> = 6)    | 0                                   | 0 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| <b>Control</b>           |                                     |   |   |   |   |   |
| Females ( <i>n</i> = 11) | 0                                   | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Males ( <i>n</i> = 6)    | 0                                   | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

The qualitative data collected at the conclusion of this study revealed differences between the male and female students in terms of their perception of the experimental treatment. Those differences opened the possibility of differential involvement of male and female students in the experimental activities, and differential learning effects, which had not been anticipated when the study was designed. Consequently, the analysis of the quantitative data was expanded to examine the possible moderating effects of gender.

The results of the ANOVA comparing the differences between the pretest (Assignment 1) and the posttest (Assignment 6) in overall writing skill are shown in Table 5: There was no statistically significant main effect for group (experimental vs. control) or gender (male vs. female) and no statistically significant interaction between these two independent variables.

Table 5

*ANOVA on Pretest-Posttest Differences in Overall Writing Skills: Between-Subjects Effects*

| Source          | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | Sig. | Effect size:<br>Partial Eta Squared | Observed Power |
|-----------------|-----------|----------|------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| Corrected Model | 3         | .350     | .789 | .035                                | .110           |
| Intercept       | 1         | .125     | .726 | .004                                | .063           |
| Group           | 1         | .309     | .582 | .011                                | .084           |
| Sex             | 1         | .721     | .403 | .024                                | .130           |
| Group * Sex     | 1         | .097     | .757 | .003                                | .060           |
| Error           | 29        |          |      |                                     |                |
| Total           | 33        |          |      |                                     |                |
| Corrected Total | 32        |          |      |                                     |                |

The pretest-posttest mean differences in overall writing skills were surprising: The control group showed a very small gain of .082 points (on a 20-point scale), whereas the experimental group registered a decline of .367 points (Table 6). This finding does not necessarily mean that students' writing skills regressed in that class but suggests that the burden of extra work involved by the experimental reading assignment slowed down rather than enhanced students' progress. Moreover, the posttest was at the end of the semester, and participants could have been exhibiting fatigue.

Table 6

*Comparative Pretest-Posttest Differences in Overall Writing Skills: Experimental Group Versus Control*

| Group                         | <i>Mean</i> | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|-------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|                               |             |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| Experimental ( <i>n</i> = 18) | -.367       | .566       | -1.525                  | .792        |
| Control ( <i>n</i> = 17)      | .082        | .574       | -1.092                  | 1.256       |

*Note.* Standard error is the standard deviation of the sampling distribution of a statistic (in this case, the *mean*), or the estimate of that standard deviation, derived from the particular sample used to compute the estimate.

According to the mean differences shown in Table 7, the overall writing scores of all female participants (irrespective of the experimental condition) declined slightly from pretest to posttest by .485 points (out of 20 points), whereas the corresponding scores of the male participants rose slightly by .200 points. This finding suggests that the learning effectiveness in that particular class (irrespective of the experimental reading supplement) tended to be lower with the female students than with the male students.

Table 7

*Comparative Pretest-Posttest Differences in Overall Writing Skills: Males Versus Females*

| Sex                     | <i>Mean</i> | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|                         |             |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| Male ( <i>n</i> = 12)   | .200        | .673       | -1.176                  | 1.576       |
| Female ( <i>n</i> = 23) | -.485       | .444       | -1.393                  | .424        |

The mean pretest-posttest differences in overall writing scores in the experimental and control groups by gender are presented in Table 8. The results reveal comparable mean differences between experimental and control participants among males and females (.60 points

for males and 1.97 points for females), with the experimental participants of both genders performing worse at posttest.

Table 8

*Comparisons by Gender of Pretest-Posttest Differences in Overall Writing Skills: Experimental Versus Control*

| Sex    | Group                    | Mean  | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|        |                          |       |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| Male   | Exper ( <i>n</i> = 6)    | -.150 | .952       | -2.096                  | 1.796       |
|        | Control ( <i>n</i> = 6)  | .550  | .952       | -1.396                  | 2.496       |
| Female | Exper ( <i>n</i> = 12)   | -.583 | .614       | -1.840                  | .673        |
|        | Control ( <i>n</i> = 11) | -.386 | .642       | -1.699                  | .926        |

Hypothesis 2: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve the content/vocabulary of students' writing assignments.

Hypothesis 3: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve the organization of students' writing assignments.

The data available for content/vocabulary and text organization were collected from Writing Assignments 2 to 5, which were graded using a 30-point scale for content /vocabulary and 25-point scale for text organization. Because there was no pretest (baseline) data for content/vocabulary and text organization (i.e., data collected before the first reading experimental treatment, which was the students' linguistic level and not only content/vocabulary and text organization) it was not possible for the researcher to capture the full effects of the experimental treatment. The available data only support the analysis of changes in content/vocabulary and text organization scores that occurred between Writing Assignments 2 and 5.

The fact that the readings administered to the participants in the experimental group prior to the writing assignments were different for each assignment, and the fact that all four writing assignments (administered to the whole class) differed from one assignment to the next precluded the utilization of “repeated measures” as a procedure of statistical analysis, in spite of the fact that the same grading rubric was used for grading all writing assignments.

The results of the analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the gains from Writing Assignment 2 to Writing Assignment 5 in terms of content/vocabulary and text organization are presented in Table 9. There was no statistically significant main effect for groups (experimental vs. control) but there was for gender (light shading in Table 9). However, group and gender had a statistically significant interactive effect on both dependent variables (dark shading in Table 9).

Table 9

*MANOVA on Content-Vocabulary and Text Organization Changes from Assignment 2 to Assignment 5: Between-Subjects Effects*

| Source          | Dependent Variable | df | F      | Sig. | Effect size:<br>Partial Eta Squared | Observed Power |
|-----------------|--------------------|----|--------|------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| Corrected       | DIFF_cv            | 3  | 7.553  | .001 | .447                                | .973           |
| Model           | DIFF_org           | 3  | 4.725  | .009 | .336                                | .850           |
| Intercept       | DIFF_cv            | 1  | .947   | .339 | .033                                | .156           |
|                 | DIFF_org           | 1  | .806   | .377 | .028                                | .140           |
| Group           | DIFF_cv            | 1  | .012   | .913 | .000                                | .051           |
|                 | DIFF_org           | 1  | .035   | .853 | .001                                | .054           |
| Gender          | DIFF_cv            | 1  | 11.075 | .002 | .283                                | .895           |
|                 | DIFF_org           | 1  | 7.290  | .012 | .207                                | .741           |
| Group * Gender  | DIFF_cv            | 1  | 9.244  | .005 | .248                                | .835           |
|                 | DIFF_org           | 1  | 5.559  | .026 | .166                                | .624           |
| Error           | DIFF_cv            | 28 |        |      |                                     |                |
|                 | DIFF_org           | 28 |        |      |                                     |                |
| Total           | DIFF_cv            | 32 |        |      |                                     |                |
|                 | DIFF_org           | 32 |        |      |                                     |                |
| Corrected Total | DIFF_cv            | 31 |        |      |                                     |                |
|                 | DIFF_org           | 31 |        |      |                                     |                |

The mean changes from Writing Assignment 2 to Writing Assignment 5 in terms of content/vocabulary and text organization for the experimental and control groups are shown in Table 10. The results indicate that the experimental group gained less on both measures than the

control group did (.675 points on a 30-point scale on content/vocabulary and .675 points on a 25-point scale on text organization, shaded areas in Table 10). A possible interpretation may be that the burden of the experimental reading assignment prior to each writing assignment reduced the time and attention that students in the experimental group devoted to the writing assignment. Thus instead of enhancing their writing performance, the supplementary reading task assigned to the experimental group undercut improvements in content-vocabulary and text organization.

Table 10

*Comparative Gains in Content-Vocabulary and Text Organization: Experimental Versus Control*

| Dependent Variable         | Group                    | Mean  | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|                            |                          |       |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| Gains in content-vocab     | Exper ( <i>n</i> = 18)   | .675  | 1.148      | -1.677                  | 3.027       |
|                            | Control ( <i>n</i> = 17) | .848  | 1.064      | -1.331                  | 3.028       |
| Gains in text organization | Exper ( <i>n</i> = 18)   | .675  | 1.393      | -2.179                  | 3.529       |
|                            | Control ( <i>n</i> = 17) | 1.030 | 1.291      | -1.614                  | 3.674       |

The mean changes in content/vocabulary and text organization for male and female participants, irrespective of group assignment (additional experimental treatment), are shown in Table 11. The results indicate that from Writing Assignment 2 to Writing Assignment 5 males gained more than 3 points (out of 30) on each measure, slightly more in terms of text organization than in terms of content/vocabulary. In contrast, females registered declines in scores on both measures (-1.843 points on a 30-point scale on content/vocabulary and -1.711 points on a 25-point scale on text organization, shaded areas in Table 11), with a slightly sharper decline in content/vocabulary scores.

Table 11

*Comparative Gains in Content-Vocabulary and Text Organization: Males Versus Females*

| Dependent Variable         | Sex             | Mean   | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|                            |                 |        |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| Gains in content/vocab     | Male (n = 12)   | 3.367  | 1.270      | .766                    | 5.967       |
|                            | Female (n = 23) | -1.843 | .916       | -3.720                  | .033        |
| Gains in text organization | Male (n = 12)   | 3.417  | 1.540      | .262                    | 6.571       |
|                            | Female (n = 23) | -1.711 | 1.111      | -3.988                  | .565        |

The picture of score dynamics by gender is clarified in Table 12, which shows the mean changes in content-vocabulary and text organization for the males and females in the experimental and control subgroups. The male students in the experimental group registered smaller gains on both measures (.9 points on a 30-point scale on content/vocabulary and 1.0 on text organization on a 25-point scale, shaded grey in Table 12) than the control males did (5.833 points on each of the two measures, i.e., almost 6 times more than the experimental group). This suggests that the additional experimental reading assignment was indeed a burden for those participants and a distraction from improvement in writing. In contrast, the female students in the experimental group registered modest gains on both measures (.45 on content vocabulary and .35 on text organization), whereas the control females showed substantial declines on both measures (-4.136 points on a 30-point scale on content-vocabulary and -3.773 points on a 25-point scale on text organization, shaded grey in Table 12). The results of the female students suggest that the additional experimental reading helped them to improve their writing in terms of content-vocabulary and text organization. These findings warrant the conclusion that the additional reading assignment administered to the experimental group had differential effects by gender: It enhanced females' progress in terms of content/vocabulary and text organization while

undercutting males' progress in terms of those two measures, although the findings for the male subgroup cannot be considered conclusive because of missing data. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that these results reflect the effects of a small series of four experimental treatments. A longer series of prewriting reading assignments might yield different results.

Table 12

*Comparative Gains in Content-Vocabulary and Text Organization Between Assignments 2 and 5, by Gender and Experimental Condition*

| Dependent Variable         | Sex    | Group        | Mean   | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|----------------------------|--------|--------------|--------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|                            |        |              |        |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| Gains in content-vocab     | Male   | Experimental | .900   | 1.875      | -2.941                  | 4.741       |
|                            |        | Control      | 5.833  | 1.712      | 2.327                   | 9.340       |
|                            | Female | Experimental | .450   | 1.326      | -2.266                  | 3.166       |
|                            |        | Control      | -4.136 | 1.264      | -6.726                  | -1.547      |
| Gains in text organization | Male   | Experimental | 1.000  | 2.275      | -3.660                  | 5.660       |
|                            |        | Control      | 5.833  | 2.077      | 1.579                   | 10.087      |
|                            | Female | Experimental | .350   | 1.609      | -2.945                  | 3.645       |
|                            |        | Control      | -3.773 | 1.534      | -6.914                  | -.631       |

*Note.* Male experimental  $n = 6$ ; male control  $n = 6$ ; Female experimental  $n = 12$ ; female control  $n = 11$ .

The availability of data from four consecutive assignments for the content/vocabulary and the text organization measures made it possible to conduct a longitudinal analysis of students' mean scores on those measures. Because this study involved grades on different writing assignments that varied in content and difficulty, it was not appropriate to compute trends. Therefore this longitudinal analysis was limited to an examination of group means generated by

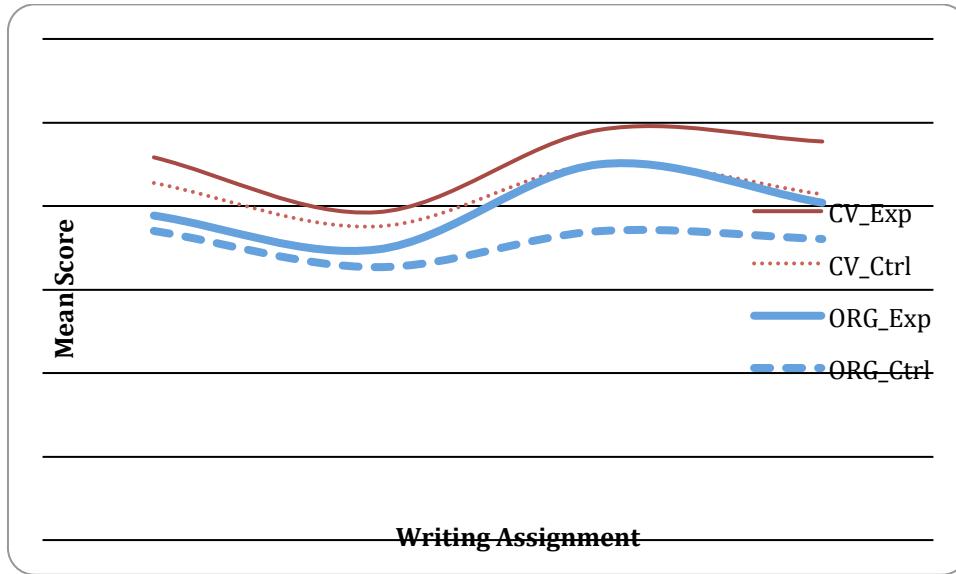
analyses of frequencies. Table 13 and *Figure 1* compare the experimental and the control groups on the two measures.

Table 13

*Comparative Dynamics of the Experimental and Control Groups in Mean Scores on Content-Vocabulary and Text Organization*

| Measure            | Group   | Statistics | Assign 2 | Assign 3 | Assign 4 | Assign 5 | Mean Diff<br>(5 - 2) |
|--------------------|---------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------------------|
| Content-vocabulary | Exper   | Mean       | 22.91    | 19.63    | 24.57    | 23.87    | 0.95                 |
|                    |         | SD         | 4.46     | 5.08     | 3.14     | 1.95     |                      |
|                    | Control | Mean       | 21.39    | 18.78    | 22.53    | 20.71    | -0.68                |
|                    |         | SD         | 6.84     | 6.57     | 4.30     | 3.19     |                      |
| Text organization  | Exper   | Mean       | 19.44    | 17.40    | 22.50    | 20.20    | 0.76                 |
|                    |         | SD         | 4.92     | 4.47     | 2.03     | 4.04     |                      |
|                    | Control | Mean       | 18.53    | 16.34    | 18.50    | 18.03    | -0.50                |
|                    |         | SD         | 5.80     | 5.38     | 5.43     | 4.39     |                      |

*Note.* Experimental  $n = 18$ ; control  $n = 17$ .



*Figure 1.* Dynamics of experimental and control scores on the content-vocabulary (CV) and text organization (ORG) measures.

Unlike the group means yielded by the analysis of variance, which excluded cases with incomplete data (i.e., included fewer than 36 cases in the analyses), the means obtained from analyses of frequencies (Table 13, *Figure 1*) were based on all available data, including the cases that lacked data for certain assignments. For that reason, the picture provided by means generated by analyses of frequencies can be considered more accurate. The limitation of frequency data is that they are purely descriptive, whereas the results of analysis of variance are inferential (predictive for a larger population). Consequently, the findings of the following longitudinal analysis based on frequency data are only true for the particular group of students involved in this experiment.

This longitudinal study of score means generated by analyses of frequencies provides a more positive picture (Table 13, *Figure 1*). In spite of the ups and downs in mean scores from one assignment to the next, the gains in mean scores from Writing Assignment 3 to 4 are stronger for the experimental group than for the control group on both measures. In addition, the

differences between the experimental and the control mean scores on both measures on Writing Assignment 5 are larger than those found on Writing Assignment 2 (indicating a divergent tendency). Also, the experimental group ended up with slightly higher mean scores on both measures (by .95 points, on a 30-point scale, on content/vocabulary and by .76, on a 25-point scale, on text organization), whereas the control group ended up with slightly lower mean scores on both measures (by .68 on content-vocabulary and .50 on text organization). These findings of the longitudinal analysis of group means generated by the analysis of frequency data indicate that the four experimental reading assignments did make a very small positive difference on the writing performance of the experimental group in terms of both content-vocabulary and text organization.

Similarly, a more detailed longitudinal analysis of experimental and control mean scores (generated by analyses of frequencies) is provided in Tables 13 and 14 and the corresponding *Figures 2 and 3*. This test compares the results of male and female students and also reveals gender-specific dynamics in their performance on Writing Assignments 2 to 5 in terms of content-vocabulary and text organization.

The male participants showed much higher means in the experimental group than in the control group on Writing Assignment 2 on both measures, but their net gains by Writing Assignment 5 were considerably smaller than those of the males in the control group (Table 14, *Figure 2*). Overall, the mean scores of male participants in the experimental and the control groups on the two measures appeared to be improving and converging through stronger improvements in the control group (5.83 points on a 30-point scale on content/vocabulary and 5.83 points on a 25-point scale on text organization for males in the control group compared to 2.43 points on content/vocabulary and 2.05 points on text organization for males in the

experimental group, Table 14). However, the number of participants in the control group was always higher due to the missing data in the experimental group. In addition, the starting scores of the control group were lower than those of the experimental group (Table 14, *Figure 2*) and improved as the course progressed. The scores in the experimental group were higher initially and maintained.

In contrast, the female participants showed slightly lower means in the experimental group than in the control group on Writing Assignment 2 on both measures (Table 15, *Figure 3*). By Writing Assignment 5, the female students in the experimental group registered extremely small net changes, whereas the females in the control group registered considerable declines on both measures (over 10% of the maximum grade) (-3.92 points on a 30 point scale on content/vocabulary and -3.66 points on a 25-point scale on text organization, Table 15) Overall, the mean scores of female participants in the experimental and the control groups on the two measures appeared to be diverging through declines in the control group. The four experimental reading tasks appear to have put female participants at an advantage relative to the control females (by preventing a decline in their content-vocabulary and text organization scores).

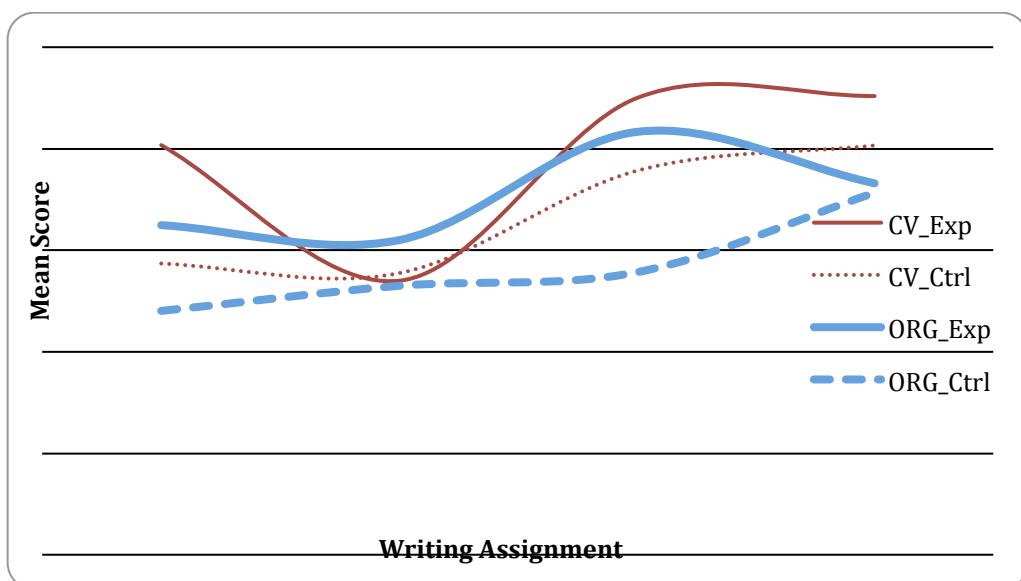
Such dramatic gender differences in experimental effects warrants further research to determine possible causes. Likely factors may be different baseline knowledge of spoken and/or written Spanish, perceptions of the utility of reading of authentic texts for the improvement of writing skills, or different amounts of time and effort put into both the reading and writing tasks. Other factors could be different general and academic work loads, different work styles, different interests in the content of each reading and writing task, and different perceptions of the challenges posed by each reading and writing task.

Table 14

*Comparative Dynamics of the Experimental and Control Groups in Mean Scores on Content-Vocabulary and Text Organization for Males*

| Measure            | Group   | Statistics | Assign 2 | Assign 3 | Assign 4 | Assign 5 | Mean Diff<br>(5 - 2) |
|--------------------|---------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------------------|
| Content-vocabulary | Exper   | Mean       | 20.17    | 13.50    | 22.50    | 22.60    | 2.43                 |
|                    |         | SD         | 5.65     | 4.92     | 2.29     | 2.51     |                      |
| Text organization  | Control | Mean       | 14.33    | 13.88    | 18.92    | 20.17    | 5.83                 |
|                    |         | SD         | 7.03     | 8.51     | 4.62     | 2.56     |                      |
| Content-vocabulary | Exper   | Mean       | 16.25    | 15.50    | 20.83    | 18.30    | 2.05                 |
|                    |         | SD         | 6.35     | 0.50     | 1.15     | 6.58     |                      |
| Text organization  | Control | Mean       | 12.00    | 13.25    | 13.92    | 17.83    | 5.83                 |
|                    |         | SD         | 5.11     | 7.50     | 4.55     | 3.44     |                      |

*Note.* Experimental  $n = 18$ ; control  $n = 17$ .



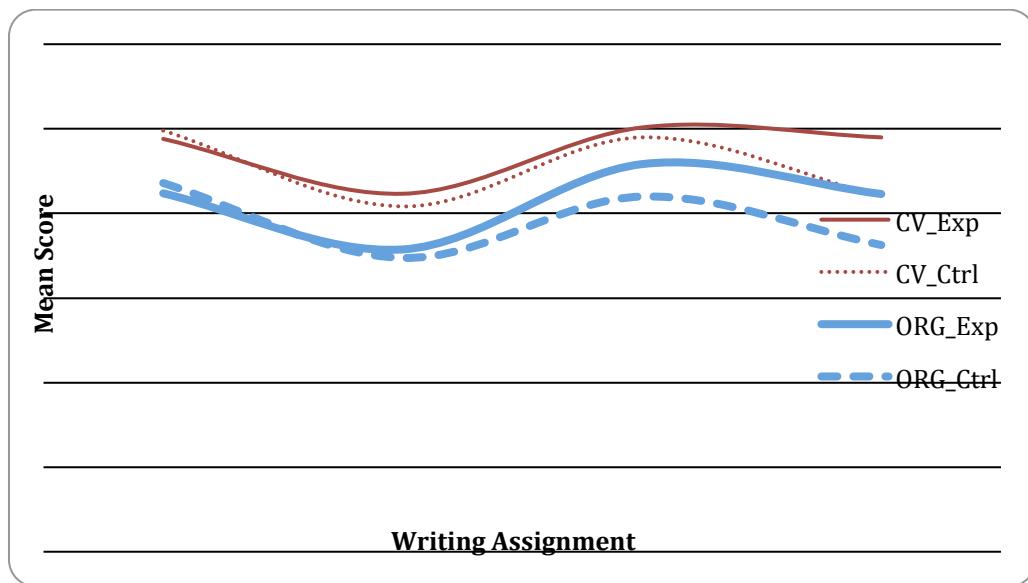
*Figure 2.* Dynamics of experimental and control scores on the content/vocabulary and text organization measures for males.

Table 15

*Comparative Dynamics of the Experimental and Control Groups in Mean Scores on Content-Vocabulary and Text Organization for Females*

| Measure            | Group   | Statistics  | Assign 2 | Assign 3 | Assign 4 | Assign 5 | Mean Diff<br>(5 - 2) |
|--------------------|---------|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------------------|
| Content-vocabulary | Exper   | <i>Mean</i> | 24.41    | 21.17    | 25.08    | 24.50    | 0.09                 |
|                    |         | <i>SD</i>   | 2.97     | 3.96     | 3.19     | 1.33     |                      |
|                    | Control | <i>Mean</i> | 24.92    | 20.42    | 24.50    | 21.00    | -3.92                |
|                    |         | <i>SD</i>   | 3.01     | 5.24     | 2.61     | 3.56     |                      |
| Text organization  | Exper   | <i>Mean</i> | 21.18    | 17.88    | 22.92    | 21.15    | -0.03                |
|                    |         | <i>SD</i>   | 3.04     | 4.91     | 2.01     | 1.76     |                      |
|                    | Control | <i>Mean</i> | 21.79    | 17.38    | 21.00    | 18.14    | -3.66                |
|                    |         | <i>SD</i>   | 2.31     | 4.42     | 4.15     | 4.99     |                      |

*Note.* Experimental  $n = 18$ ; control  $n = 17$ .



*Figure 3.* Dynamics of experimental and control scores on the content/vocabulary and text organization measures for females.

The findings of the longitudinal study of group means (generated by analyses of frequencies) are quite different from the results of the analyses of variance. This is not surprising for a small group of participants ( $N = 36$ ), particularly with an incomplete set of data. However, these preliminary results (using a smaller than ideal group of students) provided valuable insights about the importance of gender as a moderating factor of authentic reading as a possible enhancer of subsequent writing in Spanish, in the context of a Spanish writing class for novices. These insights can be used to inform the design of future research in this area.

Overall, the analyses of variance and the longitudinal examination of group means generated by analyses of frequencies provided conflicting and intriguing evidence about the utility of authentic reading as an enhancer of writing skills for novice Spanish students. Additionally, the evidence provided by the analysis of the study prompts more sophisticated research on this topic using larger samples of participants, which would allow for more comprehensive sets of moderating and mediating variables, in other words, more complete models of the behavior under study when using authentic texts. A new study would enable researchers to disambiguate the effect of reading on writing from the main and/or interactive effects of other possible confounding factors such as academic workload or the different perceptions of authentic materials.

## **Qualitative Results**

The qualitative results that pertained to Hypothesis 4, as shown below, assisted in interpreting the students' perceptions of the study.

Hypothesis 4: Students will perceive the authentic reading comprehension activities as helpful in improving their writing skills.

In order to test Hypothesis 4, the researcher administered an anonymous post-experiment survey to the 18 participants in the experimental group. The 17 students who completed the

survey were 12 women aged 18 to 28 years, and 5 men aged 20 to 24 years. The median age for the entire group was 20 years old (20 for women and 19.5 for men). All the students' native language was English and the language spoken at home was also English. Moreover, all the students' daily reading and writing activities were in English outside the Spanish class. Three expressed having Spanish speaking friends. However, their language of communication was English.

The questionnaire used 5-point Likert scales (a summated scale) to measure students' attitudes toward the experimental study (from -2 for extreme negative attitude to +2 for extreme positive attitude; zero was used for neutral attitudes). The respondents marked on the Likert scales their agreement or disagreement with the following eight items:

1. I found the reading comprehension activities before the "Escrituras" useful because they facilitated my communication through writing.
2. I feel the reading comprehension activities helped me learn more about the Spanish vocabulary.
3. I found that the reading comprehension activities helped me understand and reinforce my knowledge of the Spanish written language.
4. I organize my writing better because of the reading comprehension activities.
5. I feel the reading comprehension activities helped with the content of my "Escrituras."
6. I found that the reading comprehension activities helped me include adequate information.
7. I feel I can communicate my ideas better because I can logically and effectively order them now.
8. I would recommend assigning a reading comprehension activity related to the "Escritura" topic prior to writing it.

The 17 respondents who performed experimental reading tasks prior to Writing Assignments 2 to 5 had generally positive attitudes toward the eight items included in the survey questionnaire, as demonstrated by the positive mean values in Table 16 and *Figure 4*. These findings support Hypothesis 4 and indicate moderately positive attitudes toward the use of reading (comprehension) tasks prior to writing assignments. The highest agreement was

expressed relative to Items 1 and 8 (bold in Table 16), which were the least specific in terms of the kind of benefits derived from the experimental treatment. This may be the outcome of a desirability bias, meaning that the participants inferred that the most desirable response would be “completely agree” (+2). However, the mean value of agreement to Items 1 and 8 was only slightly above 50% of the maximum value possible. The least agreement (shaded in *Figure 4*) was expressed relative to Item 4 (improved organization of writing assignments as a result of the reading tasks), Item 5 (improved content of writing assignments), and Item 6 (improved selection of appropriate/relevant information).

The higher standard deviation values indicate more disagreement among respondents on a particular issue. The participants agreed the most among themselves on Items 1 and 8 (the least specific statements). Conversely, they disagreed the most among themselves on Item 4 (improved text organization) and Item 5 (improved content).

Table 16

*Agreement on the Eight Items: Descriptive Data*

| Item          | Mean         | SD           | Minimum   | Maximum    |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Item 1</b> | <b>1.059</b> | <b>.4287</b> | <b>.0</b> | <b>2.0</b> |
| Item 2        | .647         | .8618        | -1.0      | 2.0        |
| Item 3        | .824         | .6359        | -1.0      | 2.0        |
| Item 4        | .294         | 1.1048       | -2.0      | 2.0        |
| Item 5        | .471         | 1.0073       | -1.0      | 2.0        |
| Item 6        | .529         | .7174        | -1.0      | 2.0        |
| Item 7        | .824         | .7276        | -1.0      | 2.0        |
| <b>Item 8</b> | <b>1.059</b> | <b>.4287</b> | <b>.0</b> | <b>2.0</b> |

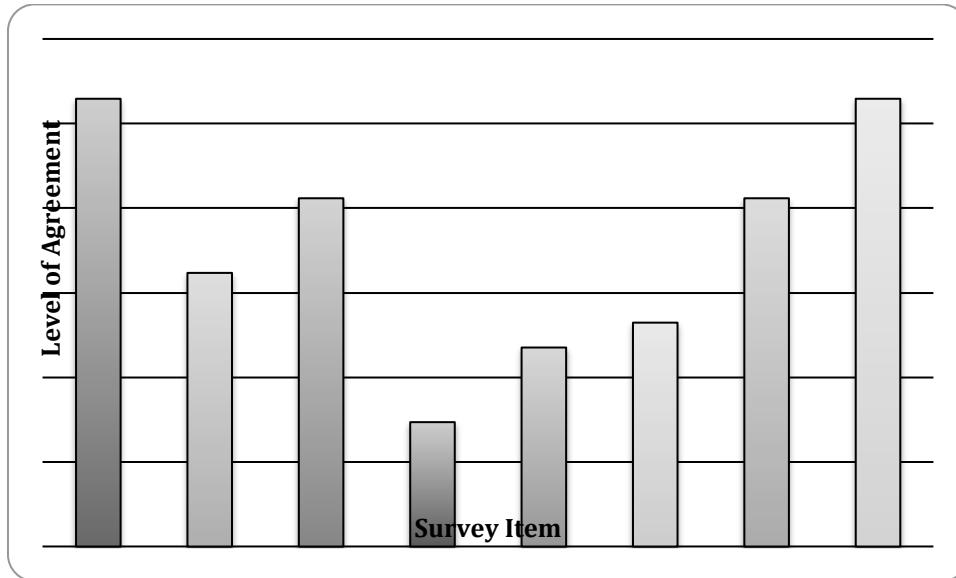


Figure 4. Participants' average agreement with the eight survey statements.

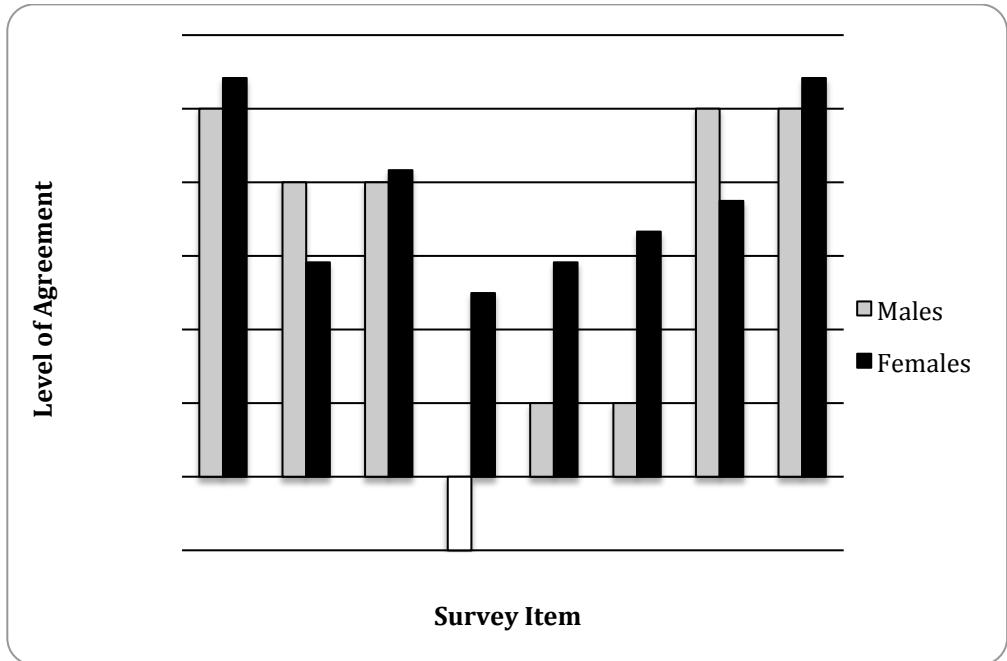
More detailed descriptive information by gender is provided in Table 17 and *Figure 5*. It appears that the smaller subgroup of males ( $n = 5$ ) tended to be less positive (more critical) than the females ( $n = 12$ ). The highest mean values of agreement in the male subgroup did not exceed 50% of the maximum value possible (1 point) on Item 1 (improved communication through writing), Item 7 (improved logical order), and Item 8 (recommend reading tasks prior to writing assignments). Also, men registered a small negative mean on Item 4, which means that male students did not believe that the reading tasks led to better text organization in the writing assignments.

Table 17

*Agreement on the Eight Items: Descriptive Data by Gender*

| Sex     | Item          | N  | Mean         | SD            | Minimum | Maximum |
|---------|---------------|----|--------------|---------------|---------|---------|
| Males   | <b>Item 1</b> | 5  | <b>1.000</b> | .0000         | 1.0     | 1.0     |
|         | Item 2        | 5  | .800         | <i>1.0954</i> | -1.0    | 2.0     |
|         | Item 3        | 5  | .800         | <i>1.0954</i> | -1.0    | 2.0     |
|         | Item 4        | 5  | -.200        | <i>1.0954</i> | -2.0    | 1.0     |
|         | Item 5        | 5  | .200         | .8367         | -1.0    | 1.0     |
|         | Item 6        | 5  | .200         | .4472         | .0      | 1.0     |
|         | <b>Item 7</b> | 5  | <b>1.000</b> | .7071         | .0      | 2.0     |
|         | <b>Item 8</b> | 5  | <b>1.000</b> | .0000         | 1.0     | 1.0     |
| Females | <b>Item 1</b> | 12 | <b>1.083</b> | .5149         | .0      | 2.0     |
|         | Item 2        | 12 | .583         | .7930         | -1.0    | 2.0     |
|         | Item 3        | 12 | .833         | .3892         | .0      | 1.0     |
|         | Item 4        | 12 | .500         | <i>1.0871</i> | -1.0    | 2.0     |
|         | Item 5        | 12 | .583         | <i>1.0836</i> | -1.0    | 2.0     |
|         | Item 6        | 12 | .667         | .7785         | -1.0    | 2.0     |
|         | Item 7        | 12 | .750         | .7538         | -1.0    | 2.0     |
|         | <b>Item 8</b> | 12 | <b>1.083</b> | .5149         | .0      | 2.0     |

Two other low agreement values in the male subgroup are found related to Item 5 (improved content as a result of the reading tasks) and Item 6 (improved selection of appropriate/relevant information). According to the standard deviation data, the 5 male participants reached consensus (i.e., perfectly agreed among themselves) on Item 1 (improved communication through writing) and Item 8 (recommend reading tasks prior to writing assignments), and they disagreed the most among themselves on Item 2 (improved vocabulary), the generic Item 3 (improved writing in Spanish), and Item 4 (improved text organization).



*Figure 5. Males' and females' average agreement with the eight survey statements.*

The larger female subgroup (12 participants) expressed higher agreement than the male subgroup on Item 1 (improved communication through writing) and Item 8 (recommend reading tasks prior to writing assignments), but lower agreement on Item 7 (improved logical order). The pattern of women's lowest agreement matched that of the male subgroup: The women's lowest values were found on Item 4 (improved text organization), although not to the extent of turning into disagreement (i.e., a negative value), Item 5 (improved content as a result of the reading tasks), and Item 6 (improved selection of appropriate/relevant information). It appears that the women's criticism (range of mean values: .500 to .583) was considerably milder than the men's (range of mean values: -.200 to +.200). According to the standard deviation data, the female participants could not reach consensus on any items, and their highest agreement among themselves occurred on the generic Item 3 (improved writing in Spanish). The women's highest

disagreement among themselves was found on Item 4 (improved text organization) and Item 5 (improved content).

Pearson correlations across the responses to the eight items reveal the most similar (highly correlated) attitudes. These results are shown in Table 18. The highest correlations (significant at probability level .01; shaded in Table 18) were found for Item 1 (improved communication through writing) with Item 4 (improved text organization), Item 5 (improved content), and Item 7 (improved logical order). These correlations indicate that respondents perceive communication in writing to rely primarily on the ability to deliver more (accurate) content, to organize it, and to present content in a logical order. Other high correlations were found between Item 4 (improved text organization) and Item 6 (selection of relevant information), and between Item 5 (improved content) and Item 6 (selection of relevant information). The findings of the correlation analysis show that the respondents shared perceptions about related factors of writing that are generic and structural rather than specific to the Spanish language.

To summarize, this survey shows that the perception of the students as far as the study is concerned was positive toward the eight items. These results inform the researcher about what the students' perception might be toward similar future research. The results also facilitate the design of similar research.

The current study examined the quantitative and qualitative research results. First, the quantitative findings compared the gains on the pretest (Assignment 1) and posttest (Assignment 6) between the experimental and the control group in terms of overall writing skills. The comparison was performed using ANOVA. No statistical significance was found between the groups. Second, a more detailed analysis was performed to compare the scores for combined

content/vocabulary and text organization for Assignments 2 to 5. A MANOVA was used to compare these scores. There was no statistically significant main effect for groups (experimental vs. control) but there was for gender. Third, a survey was administered to collect the qualitative data to examine the students' perceptions towards study. The Likert Scales (a summated scale) were used. The results showed that the students' perceptions were moderately positive.

Table 18

*Pearson Correlations Across Responses*

|        |                     | Item1   | Item2  | Item3  | Item4   | Item5   | Item6   | Item7   | Item8 |
|--------|---------------------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Item 1 | Pearson Correlation | 1       | .060   | .270   | .621 ** | .655 ** | .502 *  | .636 ** | .320  |
|        | Sig. (2-tailed)     |         | .820   | .295   | .008    | .004    | .040    | .006    | .211  |
| Item 2 | Pearson Correlation | .060    | 1      | .449   | .313    | .563 *  | .523 *  | .094    | -.279 |
|        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .820    |        | .070   | .222    | .019    | .031    | .720    | .279  |
| Item 3 | Pearson Correlation | .270    | .449   | 1      | -.010   | .430    | .218    | .604 *  | .040  |
|        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .295    | .070   |        | .968    | .085    | .402    | .010    | .877  |
| Item 4 | Pearson Correlation | .621 ** | .313   | -.010  | 1       | .598 *  | .816 ** | .146    | -.039 |
|        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .008    | .222   | .968   |         | .011    | .000    | .575    | .882  |
| Item 5 | Pearson Correlation | .655 ** | .563 * | .430   | .598 *  | 1       | .672 ** | .547 *  | -.068 |
|        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .004    | .019   | .085   | .011    |         | .003    | .023    | .795  |
| Item 6 | Pearson Correlation | .502 *  | .523 * | .218   | .816 ** | .672 ** | 1       | .070    | -.108 |
|        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .040    | .031   | .402   | .000    | .003    |         | .788    | .681  |
| Item 7 | Pearson Correlation | .636 ** | .094   | .604 * | .146    | .547 *  | .070    | 1       | .236  |
|        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .006    | .720   | .010   | .575    | .023    | .788    |         | .362  |
| Item 8 | Pearson Correlation | .320    | -.279  | .040   | -.039   | -.068   | -.108   | .236    | 1     |
|        | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .211    | .279   | .877   | .882    | .795    | .681    | .362    |       |

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the potential of authentic reading activities to enhance the writing of novice university students of Spanish, with a special focus on improving text organization, content, and vocabulary. Enabling students to be in contact with authentic materials at the very early stages of language learning was expected to impact not only the development of their communicative competence, but also to affect students' attitudes toward the use of authentic materials for learning Spanish.

This chapter provides a synopsis of the present study. It reviews the research questions, the corresponding hypotheses, and the research methodology and findings. It then discusses the implications and importance of this study's results.

#### **Research Questions**

This study explored the effects of authentic readings on the written production of novice college Spanish students using the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What is the impact that authentic reading comprehension activities have on novice students' overall writing abilities demonstrated on writing assignments?

Research Question 2: What is the impact that authentic reading comprehension activities have on the content/vocabulary development of students' writing assignments?

Research Question 3: What is the impact that authentic reading comprehension activities have on the organization of students' writing assignments?

Research Question 4: What are the students' perceptions of the reading comprehension activities to enhance students' writing assignments?

Based on the reviewed literature, the researcher hypothesized the following:

Hypothesis 1: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve students' overall writing abilities demonstrated on writing assignments.

Hypothesis 2: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve the content/vocabulary of students' writing assignments.

Hypothesis 3: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve the organization of students' writing assignments.

Hypothesis 4: Students will perceive the authentic reading comprehension activities as helpful in improving their writing skills.

### **Review of Methodology**

As mentioned in chapter 3, Ary et al. (2006) defined experimental research as “a study of the effect of the systematic manipulation of one variable(s) over another variable” (p. 26). This study was quasi-experimental because the groups used for the study were already “assembled groups” (p. 26) of students enrolled in Spanish 101 classes. Those classes were selected for this experiment because the experimenter’s goal was to examine the effects of exposure to authentic texts on the writing of novice students who had little or no prior exposure to authentic material in the target language.

One class was used as the experimental group and another class was used as the control group. The course covered the first six units of the textbook, *¡Tú Dirás!* 4<sup>th</sup> edition, and each of the writing activities assigned to both groups corresponded to each of the six chapters. The researcher used the university’s course-management system (eLearning) to communicate to the students enrolled in these classes the topics and guidelines for the writing assignments, which were the same for both the experimental and the control groups. All participating students were required to submit six written assignments, one at the end of each unit. The experimental treatment involved the reading of a text related to each assignment topic, which had to be completed before the students started writing each assignment. Four authentic reading comprehension lab sessions were conducted independently with the participants in the

experimental group prior to Writing Assignments 2 to 5. The researcher also provided training for reading comprehension activities to the experimental group prior to the study. Thus, the independent variable was reading (or not reading) an authentic text prior to doing the writing assignment, and the dependent variable was the students' writing assignments and the treatment given to them.

The first writing assignment was not preceded by any reading activity for the experimental group, and the scores from that assignment were used as baseline data for both groups. All assignments were graded by the experimenter and three other raters, using a rubric that was created by the researcher, as a modified version of the rubric provided by the Basic Spanish Language Program (Appendices C and D). The dependent variable data available for the analysis included overall writing scores on Writing Assignment 1 (pretest) and Writing Assignment 6 (posttest), and subscores for content-vocabulary and text organization on Writing Assignments 2 to 5.

The difference between the scores on Writing Assignment 1 and Writing Assignment 6 was used to measure the improvement in the participants' writing skills in the experimental and the control groups. The subscores on Writing Assignments 2 to 5 were analyzed to examine the participants' learning progress between pretest and posttest in the compared groups.

Finally, the researcher administered an anonymous post-experiment survey to all the participants in the experimental group. The questionnaire used 5-point Likert scales (a summated scale) to measure students' attitude toward the study. The respondents indicated on the Likert scales their agreement or disagreement.

## **Summary of Findings**

Hypothesis 1: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve novice students' overall writing abilities demonstrated on writing assignments.

The results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) performed on the participants' gains in overall writing scores from pretest (Writing Assignment 1) to posttest (Writing Assignment 6) showed that authentic reading comprehension activities as a support skill did not improve their writing abilities. The ANOVA found no statistically significant main effects of group (experimental vs. control) and gender (male vs. female) and no statistically significant interaction between group and gender. However, small differences emerged when mean differences were examined. First, the scores of the participants in the experimental group were slightly lower at posttest for both genders, which means that the experimental treatment undercut rather than enhanced the development of the participants overall writing skills gains (as measured in this experiment). Second, the performance of the female participants in terms of overall writing scores worsened from pretest to posttests in both groups (more so in the experimental group), whereas the performance of the male participants worsened in the experimental group and slightly improved in the control group.

Hypothesis 2: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve the content/vocabulary of students' writing assignments.

Hypothesis 3: Authentic reading comprehension activities will improve the organization of students' writing assignments.

The results of the analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the gains from Writing Assignment 2 to Writing Assignment 5 in terms of content/vocabulary and text organization were the following. The experimental treatment ("group" independent variable) did not have a statistically significant main effect on either one of the changes in the two dependent variables,

as gender did. However, group and gender had a statistically significant interactive effect on both dependent variables.

When considering the mean differences, the results showed that the male students in the experimental group registered smaller gains on both measures (.9 points on a 30-point scale on content-vocabulary and 1.0 on a 25-point scale on text organization) than the control males did (5.833 points on each of the two measures, i.e., almost 6 times more than the experimental group). This suggests that the additional experimental reading assignment was indeed a burden for them and a distraction from improvement in writing. However, the findings for the male subgroup cannot be considered conclusive because of missing data, as shown in Table 1, Chapter 4. In contrast, the female students in the experimental group registered modest gains on both measures (.45 on content vocabulary and .35 on text organization), whereas the control females showed substantial declines on both measures (4.136 points on a 30-point scale on content-vocabulary and 3.773 points on a 25-point scale on text organization). The results of the female students suggest that the additional experimental reading helped them to improve their writing in terms of content-vocabulary and text organization.

In addition, the analyses of frequencies confirmed that the four experimental reading assignments did make a very small positive difference on the writing performance of the experimental group in terms of both content-vocabulary and text organization.

Hypothesis 4: Students will perceive the authentic reading comprehension activities as helpful in improving their writing skills.

The findings of the postexperimental survey administered to the participants in the experimental group revealed moderately positive attitudes toward the use of authentic reading (comprehension) tasks prior to writing assignments. The highest agreement was expressed relative to Item 1 (improved communication through writing as a result of authentic reading) and

Item 8 ( recommend reading tasks prior to writing assignments), which were the least specific in terms of the kind of benefits derived from the experimental treatment. The least agreement was expressed relative to Item 4 (improved organization of writing assignments as a result of authentic reading), Item 5 (improved content of writing assignments), and Item 6 (improved selection of appropriate/relevant information). The data analysis by gender showed that the smaller subgroup of males (5 respondents) tended to be less positive (more critical) than the larger group of females (12 respondents).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of this study include the following:

1. The number of participants was rather small (less than 30 per cell, which is the statistical requirement for normal distribution). This limitation precludes generalizations to a larger population.
2. The results reflect the effects of a small series of only four experimental treatments. A longer series of prewriting reading assignments might yield different results.
3. Analyses of variance are very sensitive to missing cases, particularly when they involve comparisons of small groups, and/or when large proportions of the cases in a group have missing data. In this particular study the missing data (Table 1, Chapter 4) made the results less conclusive, especially for the inferential analysis.
4. Content-vocabulary and text organization are somewhat subjective topics to rate.

Although the raters used a descriptive rubric to grade the students, there was always a degree of subjectivity, and that affected the accuracy of the results. Future research should pay special attention to the development and testing of grading rubrics to improve their reliability.

5. The limitation of the frequencies data used in this study is that they are purely descriptive, whereas the results of analysis of variance are inferential (predictive for a larger population). Consequently, the findings of the longitudinal analysis based on frequencies are only true for the particular group of students involved in this experiment.
6. This research considered only gender as a possible moderating variable (a second independent variable). Future studies may include more variables as possible mediating factors: baseline knowledge of spoken and/or written Spanish, preexisting perceptions of the utility of reading of authentic texts for the improvement of writing skills, general and academic work loads, work styles, time and effort inputs into both reading and writing tasks, personal interest in the content of each reading and writing task, and perceptions of the challenges posed by each reading and writing task. Results of this study are limited to novice Spanish students recruited from a college population. Similar studies with intermediate and advanced students would be useful to compare the effects of authentic readings on the improvement in writing ability at different levels of target language proficiency.
7. Students from both groups completed their writing assignments at home. Although they committed in writing to work on their own, there is no guarantee that the participants worked independently. Future studies may consider administering the writing assignments in class to ensure independent work as a prerequisite of accurate measurement of learning effects.

## **Discussion of Results and Conclusions**

Many scholars have researched the reading-to-writing relations, some of which found reading to be an effective enhancer of writing (Al-Jarf, 2004; Asenciór, 2006; Lee, 1986; Lee & Riley, 1990; Pérez-Sotelo & González-Bueno, 2003; Shang, 2007). However, this was the first study that examined the effects of authentic readings on the written production of novice Spanish students. The researcher conducted this experiment with beginner college students. Similar beginner college student samples were used previously by Asenciór (2006), Pérez-Sotelo and González-Bueno (2003), and Lee and Riley (1990).

The present study may be the first experiment that used authentic reading texts (i.e., texts that are meant for native speakers of the language) with novice student participants. The researcher found no previous studies that used authentic texts. The experimental treatment materials mentioned in the relevant literature were “Spanish translations” (Lee, 1986) or “articles” (Shang, 2007) that were not described as being authentic and could have been abridged versions of an original text. The researcher also used a control group in addition to the experimental group and was able to compare and contrast results. This is an improvement relative to Shang’s study, which had only the experimental group with no control group for comparison.

The results of the ANOVA performed on the pretest-posttest gains in overall writing skills in this experiment showed that the control group registered a small gain, whereas the experimental group showed a decline. These results contradict the findings of Al-Jarf’s (2004) study, which also examined pretest and posttest data and found that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Al-Jarf’s study used a larger sample (113 female students, compared to 36 used in this study), and consequently, Al-Jarf’s results might be more reliable.

The results of the MANOVA performed on the content-vocabulary and text organization data from Writing Assignments 2 to 5 found no statistically significant main effect on the reading treatment on either one of the changes in the two dependent variables, as gender did. However, group and gender had a statistically significant interactive effect on both dependent variables. In comparison, Lee's (1986) study, which investigated the effects of background information on L2 reading performance and information recall used pictures and titles in the texts to enhance students' performance on the dependent measures, did not consider gender as a possible moderating factor and found no statistically significant effects of the treatment.

Another study conducted by Lee and Riley (1990) with beginner students examined the effects that text adjuncts as rhetorical structures, such as titles or pictures, had on reading comprehension and information recall. That experiment found that the structural organization treatment significantly enhanced students' recall. The researchers concluded that the more tightly organized a passage, the more easily it was comprehended by nonnative speakers yet there was no specific reference made to whether the type of texts used in the study were authentic or not.

The moderately positive attitudes of the participants in the present experiment toward the use of reading (comprehension) tasks prior to writing assignments were similar to findings of a study by Shang (2007), who used e-mail activities to enhance language learning. Shang's students reported that they had enjoyed the e-mail activity because it provided more writing practice, and they believed their writing had improved with the experiment. Shang's students also said that they had enjoyed using language in a more authentic medium.

The present study contributes to the literature in several ways:

1. This is the only study to date that has investigated the effects of authentic texts on the written production of novice Spanish students in college, especially on content-vocabulary and text organization.
2. The researcher used a comprehensive theoretical framework for the experiment design and the interpretation of research findings. A rich framework is a prerequisite of a good choice of research methods and instruments and also facilitates the understanding of the results.

One of the theories used in this study was the competence/performance theory, according to which competence in writing is acquired the same way as competence in the oral language (Krashen, 1984). In addition, Hirvela (2004) argued that “knowledge of writing comes from the input provided by reading” (p. 112). Those two sources account for the use of a reading treatment in the present study as a possible enhancer of writing skills. Krashen (1984) proposed that instructors should try to facilitate the discovery of meaning. That argument accounts for the focus on reading comprehension in the present study.

Another theory considered in this study was schema theory. Clarke and Silberstein (1977) referred to the schema theory and stated that “more information is contributed by the reader than by the print of the page” (p. 136). That theory might explain why the reading assignment administered to the experimental group in the present study had differential effects by gender, enhancing females’ progress in terms of content-vocabulary and text organization while undercutting males’ progress in terms of those two measures. The gender-specific schemata might have intervened in the process of

language learning. However, each individual has his or her own pace in acquiring a language.

3. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of the present study was that gender was found to affect the degree to which the use of authentic reading materials helped to improve novice students' writing skills. First, the findings of the study showed statistically significant results for the female subgroup whereas the male subgroup did not show statistical significance. This may reveal that the female participants were more involved because they found the writing topics more appealing. Consequently, text choice should be reconsidered in future studies. Second, there were double the number of female participants in comparison to female participants in both the experimental and control groups. This might be an indicator that the interest of female students in language learning is higher than that of male students. In conclusion, the gender differences revealed by this investigation warrant further and more detailed research to determine possible underlying causes.
4. This research with novice learners establishes a framework for examination of conducting future research at other levels such, as Intermediate or Advanced levels and, eventually, incorporating the findings to the teaching of a comprehensive language program.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
IRB APPROVAL

Office for Research

Office of the Director of  
Research Compliance



June 15, 2011

Ana Capanegra  
Department of Modern Languages & Classics  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Box 870246

Re: IRB#: 11-OR-203 "A Study on the Effects of Authentic Reading Activities on the Written Production of Novice College Spanish Students"

Dear Ms. Capanegra:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on June 29, 2011. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure Form. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the Continuing Review and Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped information sheets to obtain consent from your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

  
Carpanegra T. Myles, MSM, CRM  
Director & Research Compliance Officer  
Office of Research Compliance  
The University of Alabama

152 Rose Administration Building  
Box 870104  
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## APPENDIX B

### MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS, READINGS & WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

## SP101 – Escritura

### **Escritura 1** Topic: La vida del estudiante

#### Step 1 – Organize

Look at each of the information points below and think about what you can say about your lifestyle in regard to these aspects. Then organize your ideas in a logical order.

Your professor would like to know more about you and your routine at school. Write a brief description about yourself including the following information:

- your name and place of origin
- your daily routine
- your eating habits: drinks, snacks and/or light meals

#### Step 2 – Write a rough draft

\*Your instructor may or may not require you to turn in a rough draft.

Have you provided information for all the points addressed in the opening section? Do you need more details?

1. Is your description clear enough? Would you consider changing the organization of your description to make it clearer?
2. Have you used the appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures that you learned in this chapter to talk about yourself and your activities and to describe different types of food?

#### Step 3 – Final Check

Based on the review of your draft, make the necessary adjustments and incorporate any new ideas that have occurred to you. Before you submit your composition, read it again and check for any misspelled words or phrases. Finally, make sure that all your changes have been implemented.

## **READING 2**

### ***The Simpsons***

**Open the link below, read the description of the Simpsons and choose the answer you think represents best the content, vocabulary use and text organization of the page. A scale 1 to 4 is used in the answers. Number 1 represents the highest score and 4 the lowest.**

[\*\*http://cybersimpsons.110mb.com/personajes/familia.htm\*\*](http://cybersimpsons.110mb.com/personajes/familia.htm)

- A) Would you say that the content in the different paragraphs describing each member of the Simpson family is
- 1- Relevant and on target
  - 2- Lacks supporting detail
  - 3- Limited and not developed
  - 4- Inappropriate
- B) Would you say the paragraphs as far as text organization is concerned are
- 1- Logically and effectively ordered
  - 2- An apparent order is intended
  - 3- Lack logical sequencing of ideas
  - 4- Disconnected in meaning
- C) As far as the use of vocabulary is concerned, would you say that it is
- 1- Precise and Effective
  - 2- Adequate
  - 3- Limited
  - 4- Inadequate

D) Would you say that the content in this family description, the organization and vocabulary used are

- 1- Very much on target
- 2- On target
- 3- Somewhat on target
- 4- Off target

## Copy of Reading 2

**THE SIMPSONS.COM**

# LA FAMILIA SIMPSON

En esta sección encontraréis información y algunas imágenes sobre los miembros de la familia Simpson.

[[Homer](#)] [[Marge](#)] [[Bart](#)] [[Lisa](#)] [[Maggie](#)]



Como todos debéis saber, la familia Simpson se compone de 5 miembros que son, por orden de edad : Homer Jay Simpson, Marge Simpson, Bart Simpson, Lisa Simpson y Maggie Simpson, que viven en una bonita unifamiliar en Evergreen Terrace 386 (Springfield). Estos son los personajes protagonistas de la serie, aunque hay más. Además, podréis ver aquí como ha evolucionado el dibujo de cada miembro de la familia Simpson. Cada uno se caracteriza por una serie de cosas, que resumiré aquí abajo :

 **Homer Jay Simpson:** Es el padre de familia. Casado con Marge Simpson. Es hijo de Abraham Simpson y Penélope Olsen. Tiene 36 años. Su peso ronda por los 108-118 Kg. Tiene 1 hermanastro: Herbert Powell. Tiene 3 hijos: Bart, Lisa y Maggie. Trabaja como inspector de seguridad en central nuclear de Springfield. Ha llegado a ser de todo: Rock'N Rollero, inspector de sanidad, guardaespaldas, boxeador, y muchas cosas más. Bebe mucha cerveza, come muchas rosquillas, ve mucho la TV y se pasa la mitad del día en el bar de Moe. Su expresión más famosa es D'OH. Más información en [La sección de Homer](#). [Volver arriba](#).

### THE EVOLUTION OF HOMER



Evolución:



**Marge Simpson:** Antes de casarse llamada Marge Bouvier. Hija de Jackeline Bouvier y Clancy Bouvier. Tiene 34 años. Es la ama de la casa de los Simpson. Casada con Homer Jay Simpson. Tiene 3 hijos: Bart, Lisa y Maggie. Tiene 2 hermanas : Patty y Selma Bouvier. Actualmente es ama de casa, pero ha sido policía, agente inmobiliario, humorista y más cosas. Es la que pone un poco de sentido común a las decisiones de Homer. Es muy cristiana y hace que su familia vaya todos los domingos a la iglesia. Le gusta hacer las tareas de casa, ir a la iglesia y hacer actividades y viajes familiares. [Volver arriba](#).

### THE EVOLUTION OF MARGE

Original



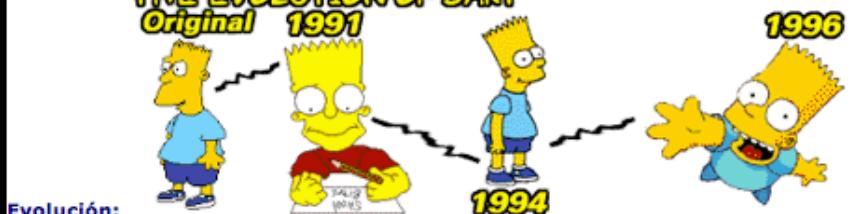
Evolución:



**Bart Simpson:** Es el hijo mayor de los Simpson. Tiene 2 hermanas: Lisa y Maggie (las dos menores que él). Tiene 10 años. Va al colegio de Springfield. Su expediente escolar es nefasto. Su mejor amigo es Milhouse. Su peor enemigo el actor secundario Bob. Ha editado "Bart Simpson: Guía para la vida", libro que ha vendido más de 350 000 ejemplares. Le gusta Skatear, hacer el gamberro, ver la TV, y ese tipo de cosas. Sus primeras palabras fueron "Ay, caramba!". Más información en [La sección de Bart](#). [Volver arriba](#).

### THE EVOLUTION OF BART

Original 1991

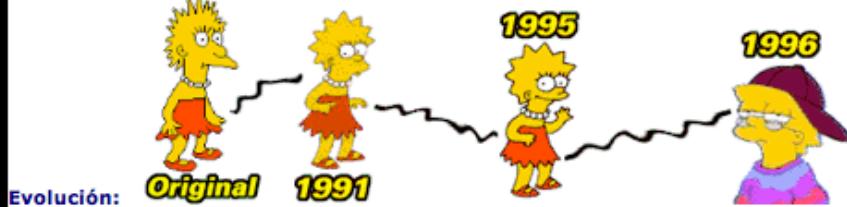


Evolución:



**Lisa Simpson:** Es la mediana de los Simpson. Tiene 2 hermanos: Bart (mayor) y Maggie (menor). Tiene 8 años. Estudia en el colegio de Springfield. Tiene un expediente escolar excelente. Ha recibido varios premios escolares, como el premio al alumno más puntual, el premio al ojito derecho de la maestra, y más. Es el miembro de la familia más listo y con mayor coeficiente intelectual. Dentro de la familia Simpson es una incomprendida. Perteneció a la asociación de Intelectuales de Springfield y ha ganado numerosos concursos intelectuales, como el rodeo de Gramática. Le encanta leer y hacer actividades culturales, pero por otra banda también le gusta ver el Show de Krusty y Rasca y Pica. La primera palabra que salió de su boca fue "Bart". [Volver arriba](#).

### THE EVOLUTION OF LISA



Evolución:



**Maggie Simpson:** Es la menor de la familia Simpson. Tiene 1 año. Tiene 2 hermanos: Bart y Lisa (los dos mayores que ella). Su nombre es Margaret, pero se le conoce por la abreviatura Maggie. Aún no va al colegio ni a la guardería y nunca se separa de su madre, Marge. Siempre avanza gateando, ya que aún no sabe andar, excepto algún que otro paso. Su rasgo más característico es el que siempre está chupando su chupete, nunca se separa de él, y es muy conocido el sonido que hace éste cuando ella lo chupa. En la serie ha hablado poquísimas ocasiones, pero la primera palabra que dijo fue "papá". [Volver arriba](#).

### THE EVOLUTION OF MAGGIE



Evolución:

Estos 5 personajes forman la familia Simpson, que para mí es la mejor de la TV y el cine, y que es tan conocida o más que otras.

## **Escritura 2** Topic: Self-portrait

### Step 1 – Organize

In order to practice your Spanish, you decide to enroll in a pen-pal program that will match you up with an individual from a Spanish-speaking country. You’re preparing to write your first email to your new pen pal and you would like to start by describing yourself. You may include the following information in your description:

- your family members
- you and your family members’ physical characteristics and personal qualities
- your likes

Decide on the personal information that you would like to provide about yourself and your family members, and make a list with the details that you consider the most interesting and dislikes as well as your family’s likes and dislikes

### Step 2 – Write a rough draft

\*Your instructor may or may not require you to turn in a rough draft.

Put the ideas from your list in paragraph form. Try to move from the more general descriptive aspects to the more specific ones.

### Step 3 – Final check

1. Have you provided information for all the points addressed in the opening section? Do you need to add more details?
2. Are the ideas expressed clearly? Would you consider changing the organization of your description to make it clearer?
3. Have you used the vocabulary and grammatical structures that you learned in this chapter to describe yourself and your family members and to express likes and dislikes?

**Sp. 101**

**READING 3**

**Click on the link below, which is a brochure about Entre Ríos, Argentina, and read it. Then decide whether the statements about content, text organization and vocabulary use of the reading are True (T) or False (F).**

<http://www.turismoentrerios.com/index.html>

1- The content of this brochure is not very thorough and relevant.

a- True

b- False

2- The pictures add up and are adequate to the main idea.

a- True

b- False

3- The brochure organization is ineffective.

a- True

b- False

4- As far as organization is concerned, there is no apparent order to the content.

a- True

b- False

5- The use of vocabulary is precise and effective

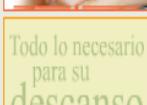
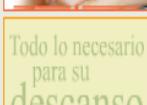
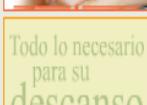
a- True

b- False

## Copy of Reading 3

**Turismoentrerios.com**  
Portal Turístico Provincial

Provincia de Entre Ríos, Jueves, 10 de Noviembre 2011

| PRINCIPAL  | CIUDADES  | PRODUCTOS   | TERMAS   | Alojamiento en Entre Ríos  |   |  |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |   |  |  |  |
|--|---|---|--|--|---|--|--|---|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|--|--|--|---|---|---|---|--|--|--|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Página Inicial</li> <li>Ciudades de Entre Ríos</li> <li>Alojamientos, Entre Ríos</li> <li>Termas &amp; Spa</li> <li>Pesca Deportiva</li> <li>Playas y Balnearios</li> <li>Turismo Activo</li> <li>Estancias y Turismo Rural</li> <li>Turismo Aventura</li> <li>Carnavales</li> <li>Sitios Históricos</li> <li>Golf</li> <li>Caza Deportiva</li> </ul>   | CIUDADES<br>Ord. Alfabéticamente ▾<br>Seleccione el Producto ▾  | PRODUCTOS<br>Seleccione el Complejo ▾   | TERMAS<br>Seleccione el Complejo ▾   | Alojamiento en Entre Ríos<br>Hoteles   Cabañas   Casas   Hosterías   Buscador rápido<br>Promociones   Listado de Paquetes Turísticos |   |  |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |   |  |  |  |
|  <b>Entre Ríos, Argentina</b>   |   |   |  |  |   |  |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |   |  |  |  |
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| <h2>PARANÁ TODO EL AÑO</h2> <p>Municipalidad de Paraná</p>   |   |   |  |  |   |  |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |   |  |  |  |
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|   |    |  | <b>Colon, Entre Ríos</b>   | <b>Termas de Entre Ríos</b>  |   |  |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |  |  |   |  |   |   |   |   |   |  |   |   |  |  |  |
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### **Escritura 3** Topic: Conocer el pueblo de.....

#### Step 1 – Organize

You are going to develop a tourist brochure. Think of a city or a town that you know well and that would be interesting to visitors. Then, prepare a brochure that includes the following information:

- major attractions
- visiting hours
- places to stay and eat

Think of the main points of interest that you would like to include in the brochure and make an outline dividing the ideas by topic, such as cultural activities, historical monuments, lodging, dining, etc. Focus on the unique qualities that set the city or town apart.

#### Step 2 – Write a rough draft

\*Your instructor may or may not require you to turn in a rough draft.

Review the outline that you prepared and create a well-organized and easy-to-use brochure providing a brief description of each attraction.

#### Step 3 – Final check

1. Have you included all of the city's/town's best features? Have you forgotten any of the landmarks or information suggested in the opening section?
2. Is the brochure useful? Would you organize it differently in order to make its use more efficient for the traveler?
3. Have you used the vocabulary and grammatical structures that you learned in this chapter in order to identify and locate places in a city or town?

## **READING 4**

**A- Open the link below, read the letter and decide whether the statements below referring to content, use of vocabulary and text organization of the writing are T (True) or F (False)**

<http://www.tuperiodicodigital.com/articulo.php?id=537>

- 1- No more can be said in this retelling; the content is very complete and all ideas are supported.

- 2- Ideas are present but not developed.

- 3- The organization of the text lacks logical sequencing of ideas.

- 4- The order is ineffective as sentences are choppy.

- 5- There is repetitive use of expressions and vocabulary words

**B- Read the letter again and decide whether the statements are T (true) or F (false).**

The trip with Iyan only lasted for a few days.

They returned from the trip very early in the morning.

## **Copy of Reading 4**

### **MIS VACACIONES FAVORITAS**

17.02.2009 - DAVID FERREIRO FERNÁNDEZ -5



MI AMIGO IVAN

Un día un amigo mío que se llama Iván, me dijo que me invitaba con su equipo de fútbol a ir a Portaventura (Barcelona). Fuimos en autobús allí. 5 horas después, llegamos al camping, a mí me tocó dormir en el sofá, pero era muy cómodo y dormí bien. Al día siguiente fuimos a Portaventura y nos subimos a tantas atracciones que al volver al autobús vomité. Al día siguiente fuimos a Portaventura acuático, mi atracción favorita era "El torrente" era ir en una balsa bajando por una pendiente con curvas y túneles que acababa en una piscina enorme. Por la noche Iván tenía la espalda toda quemada. Al día siguiente, volvimos a casa, ¡Llegamos a las 5 de la mañana! ¡Estaba que me caía de sueño!

## **Escritura 4** Topic: Vacaciones ideales

### Step 1 – Organize

Tus amigos y tú están planeando un viaje para sus próximas (next) vacaciones a un país de habla hispana. Describe tus vacaciones ideales. Incluye la siguiente información:

- ¿Cuándo vas a viajar? (el mes y/o la estación)
- el tiempo óptimo
- las actividades diarias que vas a hacer

Piensa en las vacaciones de tus sueños. Ahora imagina que tus sueños se han cumplido (have come true) y ya estás de vacaciones. ¿Qué mes y/o estación es? ¿Qué tiempo hace? ¿Cuáles son algunas de las actividades que vas a hacer?

### Step 2 – Write a rough draft

\*Your instructor may or may not require you to turn in a rough draft.

Ahora, escribe una breve descripción de cómo van a ser tus vacaciones. Incluye tus ideas sobre la estación, el tiempo y tus actividades planeadas.

### Step 3 – Final check

1. ¿Incluyes todas las actividades que tienes planeadas? ¿Hay algo más interesante sobre el destino (destination) que puedes mencionar?
2. ¿Es tu descripción completa? ¿Está organizada lógica y claramente?
3. ¿Incluyes el vocabulario y las estructuras gramaticales que aprendiste (you learned) en este capítulo para hablar de tus planes para el futuro inminente, el tiempo y las actividades?

## READING 5

**A- The link below is the third part of a diary a couple wrote about a trip they made around some locations to two countries in Latin America. Open the link, read the paragraph about Iguazú, Argentina, and circle the word phrases that best describe the content, text organization and vocabulary use.**

<http://www.viajeros.com/diarios/puerto-iguazu/aa-aa-aa-iguazu-amazing-parte-1>

1- The content is

- a- Very adequate
- b- Somewhat adequate
- c- Very limited
- d- Minimal and not enough

2- The text organization is

- a- Detailed and connected
- b- Loosely organized
- c- Not ordered to the content
- d- Limited and lacks logically sequencing
- e- A series of disconnected ideas

3- Vocabulary use is

- a- Broad, precise and effective
- b- Adequate but not impressive
- c- Translated and invented at times
- d- Inadequate, repetitive and incorrect

**B- Read the description once more and decide whether the statements are T (true) or F (false)**

The town of Iguazú is cheap. \_\_\_\_\_

They went to the town on foot. \_\_\_\_\_

## Copy of Reading 5

### Argentina 2011



Escribe: [amarcela22](#)

Es mi primera vez en un diario de viajes. Realmente, lamento no haber conocido esta página antes; de seguro mi relato sería más preciso porque intentaría darle el mayor número de detalles para utilidad de quienes lo lean. Sin embargo, no por escribirlo meses más tarde del viaje (febrero 2011) deja de ser tan especial e íntimo como lo fue desde que lo visualicé; de hecho, se me quiebra un poco la voz cuando lo comento con alguien... Así que bueno, quiero compartirlo con ustedes y volver a vivirlo !!!

[Enviar a un amigo](#) [Imprimir](#)

- 
- 
- 

[< Capítulo Anterior](#)[Capítulo 1](#)[Capítulo 2](#) Capítulo actual: [3](#) [Capítulo 4](#)[Capítulo 5](#)[Capítulo 6](#)[Capítulo 7](#)[Capítulo 8](#)[Capítulo 9](#)[Capítulo Siguiente >](#)

## iii Iguazú Amazing !!! Parte 1

[Puerto Iguazú, Argentina](#) — sábado, 5 de febrero de 2011

Madrugamos muchísimo para abordar el vuelo a Iguazú desde el aeroparque, pero llegamos muy temprano para poder conocer el pueblo y también descansar (era necesario, aún quedaban muchos días). No pudimos tomar el desayuno en el hotel y en Newbery es costoso (2 medialunas pequeñas y 2 cafés US\$ 20). El vuelo fue cómodo, aunque algo frío y desde arriba, veíamos como se fundía la ciudad con el Río de la Plata. Hermosa postal ...

Como siempre, nos esperaban en el aeropuerto. Tuvimos un inconveniente con una de las maletas pero la aerolínea se portó muy bien y para la tarde, ya nos la habían enviado al hotel.

El camino nos encantó; fue como haber cambiado de país; absolutamente selvático y húmedo, pero con vías en muy buen estado.

Nos instalamos en el hotel y como quedaba fuera del pueblo, tomamos frente a él un bus (2 pesos cada uno) para ir hasta el centro. Les ofrecerán excusiones para el recorrido del pueblo que incluyen ir hasta el Hito Tres Fronteras (Argentina, Brasil y Paraguay) pero ustedes pueden hacerlo caminando sin prisa y mirando más de cerca el pueblo. Iguazú es pequeño y puede recorrerse en

una tarde; la oferta gastronómica no es muy amplia pero hay para todos los gustos y bolsillos; tiene 2 casas de cambio que trabajan hasta las 8 pm (creo); un sitio de internet y varias tiendas de recuerdos. Tomamos algunas fotos, la primera Quilmes del viaje y por recomendación de algunos amigos, compramos lo necesario para las onces y almuerzo del día siguiente (en los parques naturales todo es costoso). Pueden llevar enlatados, preparar sánduches, maní, paquetes, mucho líquido y uno que otro dulce como energético.

Regresamos al hotel en el mismo bus y no podemos esperar a que sea el día siguiente para ver las Cataratas ...

#### Tips:

Puedes conocer el pueblo por tu cuenta, sólo necesitas ganas, ropa liviana y zapatos cómodos

Tiene que ver con: Ahorrar dinero

En [Puerto Iguazú, Argentina](#).

## **Escritura 5-** Tema: Mis últimas vacaciones

**Paso 1:** ¿Cómo fueron tus últimas vacaciones? Considera estas preguntas:

¿Dónde fuiste?; ¿Cuándo fuiste?; ¿Cuántos días pasaste allí?; ¿Con quién fuiste?; ¿Qué hiciste?

**Paso 2:** Escribe un borrador

**Paso 3:** Chequea tu escritura

- Revisa los detalles y el uso de la lengua
- Revisa la organización
- Revisa el vocabulario

## **Escritura 6** Tema: La fiesta más divertida

**Paso 1:** ¿Cuál fue la fiesta más divertida que fuiste? Puede ser una fiesta de Navidad, Año Nuevo, cumpleaños, aniversario o cualquier otra celebración. Considera estas preguntas:

¿Qué fiesta fue?; ¿Dónde fue?; ¿Cuándo fuiste?; ¿Cuántas personas fueron?; ¿Con quién fuiste?; ¿Qué ropa llevaste?; ¿Qué hiciste?

**Paso 2:** Escribe un borrador

**Paso 3:** Chequea tu escritura

- Revisa los detalles y el uso de la lengua
- Revisa la organización
- Revisa el vocabulario

## APPENDIX C

### DEPARTMENT EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR WRITING ACTIVITIES

**University of Alabama**  
**Department of Modern Languages & Classics**  
**Basic Language Spanish Program**

**Evaluation Criteria for Writing Activities**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ SP \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_

Assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

| <b>Content (Information Conveyed)</b>   | <b>Points</b> |
|---|---------------|
| *minimal information; information lacks substance; inappropriate or irrelevant information; not enough information to evaluate.                                       | 0 - 10        |
| *limited information; ideas present but not developed; lack of supporting detail or evidence.   | 11- 20        |
| *adequate information; some development of ideas; some ideas lack supporting detail or evidence.  | 21 - 25       |
| *very complete information; no more can be said; thorough, relevant, on target.   | 26 – 30       |
| <b>Organization</b>   | <b>Points</b> |
| *series of separate sentences with no transitions; disconnected ideas; no apparent Order to the content; or not enough to evaluate.                                   | 0 - 5         |
| *limited order to the content; lacks logical sequencing of ideas; ineffective ordering; very choppy, disjointed.  | 6 - 10        |
| *an apparent order to the content is intended; somewhat choppy, loosely organized but main points do stand out although sequencing of ideas is not complete.          | 11 - 20       |
| *logically and effectively ordered from introduction to conclusion; main points and details are connected; fluent.  | 21 - 25       |
| <b>Vocabulary</b>   | <b>Points</b> |
| *inadequate; repetitive; incorrect use or non-use of words studied; literal translations; abundance of invented words or words in English; or not enough to evaluate. | 0 - 5         |
| *erroneous word use or choice leads to confused or obscured meaning; some literal translations and invented words; limited use of words studied.                      | 6 – 10        |
| *adequate but not impressive; some erroneous word usage or choice, but meaning is not confused or obscured; some use of words studied.                                | 11 - 20       |
| *broad; impressive, precise & effective word use / choice; extensive use of words studied.  | 21 - 25       |

| <b>Language</b>  | <b>Points</b> |
|--|---------------|
| *abundance of errors in use and form of the grammar presented in lesson; frequent errors in subject / verb agreement; non-Spanish sentence structure; erroneous use of language makes the work mostly incomprehensible; no evidence of having edited the work for language; or not enough to evaluate. | 0 - 5         |
| *frequent errors in use and form of the grammar presented in lesson; some errors in subject / verb agreement; some errors in noun / adjective agreement; erroneous use of language often impedes comprehensibility; work was poorly edited for language.   | 6 - 10        |
| *occasional errors in use and form of the grammar presented in lesson; occasional errors in subject / verb or noun / adjective agreement; erroneous use of language does not impede comprehensibility; some editing for language evident but not complete.   | 11 - 15       |
| *no errors in the grammar presented in lesson; very few errors in subject / verb or noun / adjective agreement; work was well edited for language.   | 16 - 20       |
| ** Any evidence of translation from English (computer/electronic assistance) will result in a grade of NO CREDIT and the student will be asked to redo the writing assignment for credit.  |               |

APPENDIX D  
INSTRUMENT TO RECORD STUDENT POINTS

## **Instrument to record student points**

### ***Evaluation Criteria for Writing Activities***

Student's ID#: \_\_\_\_\_ SP \_\_\_\_\_ Section \_\_\_\_\_

Writing Assignment # \_\_\_\_\_ 1 / 2 Group

#### ***Content (Information conveyed)/Vocabulary (30 points)***

##### **A (25-30)**

very detailed complete information; no more can be said; thorough, relevant, on target; precise and impressive word use; extensive use of words studied

##### **B (20-24)**

adequate information; some development of ideas; some ideas lack supporting detail or evidence; some erroneous word usage or choice; some use of words studied

##### **C (10-19)**

limited information; ideas present but not developed; lack of supporting detail or evidence; some literal translations and invented words; limited use of words studied.

##### **D (0-9)**

minimal information; information lacks substance; inappropriate and irrelevant information; not enough information to evaluate; inadequate and repetitive vocabulary, literal translation; incorrect use or no use of words studied

#### ***Organization (25 points)***

##### **A (20-25)**

Logically and effectively ordered from introduction to conclusion; main points and details are connected; fluent

##### **B (10-19)**

an apparent order to the content is intended; somewhat choppy' loosely organized but main points do stand out although sequencing of ideas is not complete.

**C (5-9)**

limited order to the content; lacks logical sequencing of ideas; ineffective ordering; very choppy, disjointed.

**D (0-4)**

series of separate sentences with no transitions; disconnected ideas; no apparent order to the content; or not enough to evaluate.

**APPENDIX E**  
**PLACEMENT FORM**

**University of Alabama  
Department of Modern Languages & Classics  
Basic Spanish Language Program**

**Placement Requirements**

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ CWID: \_\_\_\_\_

BamaMail address: \_\_\_\_\_ crimson.ua.edu.

2. Indicate which SP class you are currently registered for by writing the section number in the blank:

SP 101- \_\_\_\_\_ SP 102 - \_\_\_\_\_ SP 103 - \_\_\_\_\_

SP 201- \_\_\_\_\_ SP 202- \_\_\_\_\_

3. If you took the Placement Exam, please write your score here: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Regulation for Placement into Elementary and Intermediate Spanish:**

Please check the box next to the placement criteria that pertain to how you were placed in the class that you are currently attending. If the criteria do not match, please see your instructor because you may have to change classes. Upon completion of this form, please turn it in to your instructor. Note: SP 103 is the equivalent of taking both SP 101 and SP 102 in the same semester. The same textbook is used. SP 103 is not a higher level course.

**SP 101**

\_\_\_\_\_ I have never taken a Spanish class before.

\_\_\_\_\_ I took Spanish in High School more than 4 years ago.

**SP 102**

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed SP 101 at the University of Alabama with at least a C- .

**SP 103**

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed SP 101 at a different university.

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed two or more years of High School Spanish within the past 4 years.

**SP 201**

\_\_\_\_\_ I took the placement exam.

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed SP 102 or SP 103 at the University of Alabama with at least a C-.

\_\_\_\_\_ I come from high school, by the placement exam and having 3 or more years of high school Spanish.

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed SP 102 or SP 103 at a different university, and by the placement exam.

**SP 202**

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed SP 201 at the University of Alabama with at least a C-.

If you have any questions or concerns about these placement requirements, please contact spanish@ua.edu to ask for an appointment with the staff of the Basic Spanish Language Program. Staff will also be available from 8:00 am until 2:00 pm on the first Wednesday and Friday of the semester in B.B. Comer Hall 200.

Nombre:

Clasificación (año):

Concentración/Carrera (Major):

Concentración menor:

¿Por qué estudias español?

Escribe una lista de las lenguas extranjeras que estudiaste.

Escribe una lista de otros países que has visitado.

¿Qué te gusta hacer en tu tiempo libre?

Otros comentarios (Opcional):

APPENDIX F  
STUDENT SURVEY

This survey is anonymous. Please, circle the answer that best represents your experience with this research project. Possible answers: SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), U (Undecided), D (Disagree), SD (Strongly Disagree).

- 1) I found the reading comprehension activities before the “Escrituras” useful since they facilitated my communication through writing.

SA            A            U            D            SD

- 2) I feel the reading comprehension activities helped me learn more about the Spanish vocabulary.

SA            A            U            D            SD

- 3) I found that the reading comprehension activities helped me understand and reinforce my knowledge of the Spanish written language.

SA            A            U            D            SD

- 4) I organize my writing better because of the reading comprehension activities.

SA            A            U            D            SD

- 5) I feel the reading comprehension activities helped with the content of my ‘Escrituras’.

SA            A            U            D            SD

- 6) I found that the reading comprehension activities helped me include adequate information.

SA            A            U            D            SD

- 7) I feel I can communicate my ideas better because I can logically and effectively order them now.

SA            A            U            D            SD

- 8) I would recommend assigning a reading comprehension activity related to the ‘Escritura’ topic prior to writing it.

SA            A            U            D            SD

**Personal Information**A) **Gender:** \_\_\_\_\_B) **Age:** \_\_\_\_\_C) **Prior Spanish experience:**

\_\_\_\_ 4 years of high school

\_\_\_\_ 3 years of high school

\_\_\_\_ 2 years of high school

\_\_\_\_ 1 year of high school

\_\_\_\_ 1 semester in college

\_\_\_\_ none

D) **Language (s) spoken at home:**

Mother: \_\_\_\_\_

Father: \_\_\_\_\_

Brother: \_\_\_\_\_

Sister: \_\_\_\_\_

Grandmother: \_\_\_\_\_

Grandfather: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

E) **I have Spanish speaking friends.** Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_**How often do you talk to them?** \_\_\_\_\_**F) Reading and Writing Habits in Spanish and/or English****Reading**

|                 | <b>English</b> | <b>how often?</b> | <b>Spanish</b> | <b>how often?</b> |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| E-mails         | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Newspaper       | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Books           | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Magazines       | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Blogs           | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Facebook        | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Menus           | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Brochures       | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Letters         | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Postcards       | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Other(s): _____ | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |

### **Writing**

|                  | <b>English</b> | <b>how often?</b> | <b>Spanish</b> | <b>how often?</b> |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| E-mails          | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Papers           | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Postcards        | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Letters          | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| Other (s): _____ | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |
| _____            | _____          | _____             | _____          | _____             |

**Thank you very much for your cooperation!!!**