美國英語教育中寫作教學的創新年代
—— 一九六○到七○年代

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摘 要
一九六○年代時，美國的國勢正隆，嬰兒潮世代開始進入高中及大學，而冷戰陰影下的太空競賽更推使教育得到空前的重視，連英文科也被包括在國家教育法案（National Defense Education Act）中了，寫作教學的地位也隨之提昇。在這股氣氛下，大學教育強調專業教育，特別重視學科的專業特性，高中是大學的預備教育，自然也感受到這樣的影響。
英文系在專業教育的氛圍下，重新推動將英文寫作課程排除於英文系，以便專注於研究導向的文學類課程；在此同時，一向企圖排除英文寫作課程不遺餘力的修辭學類課程，為了趕上這股專業的風潮，也將觸角伸向文學批評及語言學的領域，以擴大視野。傳統的所謂英文鐵三角：文學、語言和寫作，寫作這支腳愈益脆弱。
因此，有關英文寫作課程的研究重點，就向外去尋找新的理論泉源和啓發。有二個重要的來源：一是哈佛大學心理學教授 Jerome Bruner 一貫倡議的「過程導向」的學習，他不僅參與並主導了重大研討會的報告，也引進了俄國認知心理學者維高斯基（Vygotsky）的著作；另一個則是從英國引進了英國的實際的作法，英國成功的教學模式給美國人很大的啓發。Albert Kitzhaber 則在大學提出「新修辭學」以企圖重振英文寫作課程在大學的地位，他的論點也是承襲自 Bruner，並呼籲大學應該重視英文寫作課程。
語言學在此時也提出了一些新的觀點來解釋英文，這些也都化為課堂上實際的練習。儘管有這些新的主張，但畢竟多數未經過時間的驗證，因此，仍有待後代的努力以期能落實於課堂教學中。
關鍵詞：國家教育法案、過程導向、認知心理學、新修辭學

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ABSTRACT

By 1960’s, America was in her crowning moment. Universities were expanding by GI Bill and Baby Boom. The cold-war space race further stimulated universities as the center of focus for America’s competitiveness. English Study was also listed in the National Defense Act. The catch words of the day are: professionalism and subject discipline.

English departments seized on this opportunity and renewed their efforts to push out English Composition courses; the Rhetoric also rekindled her effort to be an independent subject. The traditional tripod of English—literature, language, composition—seemed to have lost its balance.

In order to improve English composition, scholars and teachers sought inspirations from two primary sources: First is Harvard’s Jerome Bruner, who not only authored a series of study report on education but also introduced the translation of Vygotsky’s Thought and Language. Second is the introduction of the British model, from which American educators saw a promising approach.

On the university level, Albert Kitzhaber proposed “New Rhetoric” to
reinvigorate English composition courses. His ideas are derived from Bruner’s core theory: the process of education.

At the same time, Linguistics also joined in the effort. A few new ideas were proposed and turned into actual classroom practices.

In all, 1960’s and 1970’s were a time of stimulating new ideas. However, many of these were not thoroughly tested by time. More time would be needed to refine better approaches to teach English composition.

Keywords：National Defense Act, Process, Cognitive Psychology, New Rhetoric
I. Introduction

America’s fortune experienced a 180-degree turn between the periods from 1930’s to 1960’s, so did the fortune of English education during this same period.

The philosophy of American education tends to shift along with the turn of the society’s fortune. In times of great social upheavals—1930’s & 1940’s, the society often demands education to focus on goals closer to society needs, like educating students to be good citizens; whereas in times of economical expansion and greater social mobility, the society often requests education to help expand the horizon of students, to teach students professional level skills, which leads to the professionalism of content areas. American English education experienced just such a journey.

The General Education movement prior to the War was focused on Social Adjustments and Communication studies. The former asked English teachers to meet the needs of society and students; the latter was devised as a cheap replacement for textbooks and then grew into an independent subject on its own merit.

The post-WWII golden years gave America unprecedented confidence and pride, accompanied with abundant job opportunities and hope. The country wanted to compete and dominate in every corner of the world; the society wanted to grow and expand; the individuals wanted to move upward. This was the time of GI Bill and Baby Boom. Great numbers of soldiers returned home to find work or go to colleges and started families. Everything was booming. There were new houses, new towns, and new schools everywhere.

In the academic world, the cold war contest helped set up the background and the Sputnik in 1957 provided the impulse. Suddenly,
education became the focus of the country, and the whole nation was asking education to perform better, especially on producing good scientists. Consequently, the subject of English education received enough attention for it to regain the status it had once enjoyed. That was the origin of the academic models between 1960’s and 1970’s.

II. 1960’s-1970’s-Heightened Interests and Innovative Changes

The increasing student body and space race created an environment that kept expanding the scopes of education. On the one hand, the ideal of research was revived in universities; on the other hand, the concern over international, social, and personal issues pushed English studies to the center stage of education. The tripod of English-literature, language, composition-began receiving attentions, along with the outpouring of new theories. Composition, along with the professionalization of literature, gained recognition, though it remained primarily an undergraduate course.

While writing teachers immersed themselves in theories of rhetoric, striving to establish writing as a discipline, scholars of rhetoric, on the other hand, approached literary criticism in order to expand its horizon. These concurrent movements created an environment urging for new method of writing instruction, as well as more studies on composition. This new interest in writing and new vigor in writing studies elevated the status of composition in English department as well as the status of English department itself.

At the same time, a push to establish Rhetoric as a respectable academic specialty was gaining force in the sixties, though its emergence was first started in the fifties. The professionalization of composition instruction was accompanied by the professionalization of literature teaching. Rhetoric was defined as encompassing literature, language, and composition.
In a time like this, concerned people felt that the field was too mixed up for a clear goal and definition about the subject of English. They felt the urge to ponder the subject of English on a thorough, comprehensive scale. Instead of individual scholars advocating a certain point of view, comprehensive study projects and conferences incorporating scholars, teachers, and administrators were proposed. Starting from the Basic Issues conferences in 1958 funded by the Ford Foundation, funds for English studies started pouring in.

The Basis Issues conferences saw the first cooperation among four professional organizations: American Studies Association, College English Association, Modern Language Association, and NCTE. The fundamental belief of the conferences was: “a thorough re-examination of the whole problem of the teaching of English, from the elementary grades through the graduate school, is now imperative. We think that as an initial step we need a clear formulation of the Basic Issues which confront us.” (p. 6).

The conference committee published a report in 1959: Basic Issues in Teaching English, in which 35 compelling issues were presented. The issues were presented not as a solution but as a reminder for the long process of thinking: “because obviously issues are more clearly apparent where disagreement occurs” (p. 6).

In 1959, “The Commission on English” was founded by the College Entrance Examination Board. This commission extended the work by the “Basic Issues” conferences and published: Freedom and Discipline in English in 1965. This was the first cooperation between NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) and MLA (Modern Language Association) since 1910. In 1962, the U. S. Office of Education funded Project English, and the expanded National Defense Act of 1964 included English in its funding. By 1975, graduate programs in composition began emerging. Composition teachers finally found a sense of professionalism.
Jerome Bruner and the Process of Learning

The idea of paying more attention to the process of composition was not new by 1960’s. This idea was first talked about in late 1910’s. Charles Osgood (1915), a strong proponent of the liberal education, held the view that genuine writing takes place in creative writing only and “more of the art of composition can be taught while the act of composing is going on” (p. 234).

The first extensive discussion about the process of composing was the Expressionistic Rhetoric and the Social Rhetoric movements during the 1920’s and 1930’s, in which Osgood was once again one of the key figures. Osgood (1922) emphasized the unique and creative nature of knowledge and composing that is private and personal. He believed that good writing arises from “the energies of the spirit,” (p. 164) which can be shown, through close study of classic literature, but not be taught how.

The Expressionistic Rhetoric views writing as a creative act, so the teacher’s task is to provide an environment in which students can learn what can not be directly imparted in instruction. The ideas that the writer tries to express is private and personal vision that can not be expressed in everyday language. Adele Bildresee’s (1927) Imaginary Writing was one of the most popular expressionistic textbooks of the 1920’s and 1930’s. He, too, advocated: “the art of writing cannot be taught; it can only be learned. The part the teacher can play in this process is that of guide and adviser-collaborator, if need be” (ix).

This view of a writing teacher’s task was drastically different from the traditional rhetoric. “The writing teacher must therefore encourage students to call on metaphor, to seek in sensory experience materials that can be used in suggesting the truths of the unconscious…. Through writing, student is thus getting in touch with the source of all human experience and shaping a new and better self” (Berlin, 1984, p. 75).

The Social Rhetoric held a dramatically different view about writing from the Expressionistic Rhetoric. However, it, too, came to see the value of
the process of writing, although for a different purpose. H. W. Davis at Kansas State (1930) held the view that “‘themes’ or ‘compositions’ are rarely encountered in the world of literature, journalism, society, or business” (p. 800). Writers, Davis insisted, “learn to write by writing—and correcting and revising” (P. 802).

Burges Johnson & Helene Hartley (1936) regarded the process of writing as a process of discovery—a process of invention, instead of an act of transcription. They believed that in the process of writing writers can and will work out the meaning for themselves. They were even interested in the relationship between different personalities and the types of writing process being employed. In short, as Berlin put it: “They attempted to place writing within a larger context that included the physiological, the cognitive, and, especially, the social” (Berlin, p. 84).

From the 1940’s to 1960’s, the discussion about the process of writing continued. Those discussions, in the context of supporting a certain rhetorical view, suffered from the waxing and waning of the rhetorical views. They never became the central idea of rhetoric.

Jerome Bruner turned it around and made the process the central idea of education. Berlin characterized Bruner as “an important but largely unacknowledged source of the process models of composing that are now a commonplace of our intellectual environment. He provided the ruling concepts and much of the language on which these models are based…. ” (p. 122).

Bruner authored the final report of the Woods Hole conference: The Process of Education, sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences. Though originally intended for the teaching of sciences and math, Bruner was careful enough to include examples of teaching literature in the report1. Indeed, many newly developed English programs cited this report as its

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1 This was reported in last chapter under the heading of “Spiral Curriculum.” The discussion here focuses on the concept of process.
Bruner succeeded what others had failed because he based his concept on the cognitive psychology. He introduced the concept of cognitive psychology and ushered in the influence of Piaget. Later on, in 1962, he introduced the translation of Vygotsky’s *Thought and Language* (1962). The cognitive psychology centered around the developmental characteristics of children. Instead of focusing the development of the curriculum on the discipline and characteristics of subject matter, the cognitive psychology focuses on the subject in terms of the relation between the developmental characteristics of the students and the structure of the subject.

Therefore, students only learn what they can master in relation to their cognitive development. As students grow, their cognitive sophistication level rises, so does the sophistication level of the learning. Consequently, students need to re-visit the subject several times at various levels of complexity. Learning should never be viewed as a one-time event. Rather, learning is a process, during which students re-visit the subject at increasing cognitive level. This is the foundation of Bruner’s proposal of the Spiral Curriculum.

Furthermore, Bruner emphasized the role of discovery in the learning process. He based this idea on Piaget and Vygotsky’s concept of “internalization.” Each student understands the content of a subject in terms of his ability to either “appropriate” his existing knowledge structure or “accommodate” (Piaget, 1969) to the existing knowledge structure. Through this process of internal absorption and reorganization the student restructures his knowledge and achieves a higher level of perspective.

Bruner pointed out that the essence of this process is the role of discovery. He advocates that students employ an inductive approach to arrive at their own perspective about the structure of the discipline. Students learn not by simply following the instructions but by applying a variety of methods, from intuitive, creative guess to careful verification in the most orthodox manner. Instead of relying on expert reports, students engage in the act of
discovery like a researcher in the field would do, which involves “the development of an attitude toward learning and inquiry, toward guessing and hunches toward the possibility of solving problems on one’s own” (p. 20).

In terms of teaching composition, the essence lies in the process of doing it so that students can discover how their approaches to writing work. Following the process or even the product of other writers does not help. The teacher, therefore, plays a guiding and supportive role by creating an environment in which students are encouraged to learn for themselves the approaches appropriate for a successful writing. For this matter, Bruner believes that students reap the most reward from their discovery of the tricks that make their writing work, not from extrinsic rewards like grades, because the former provides a motivation to learn more.

Learning, in Bruner’s view, is a personal process of discovery. Each student comes to terms with his own perspective of the structure of the discipline, according to the developmental characteristics at the time. Therefore, each student arrives at his/her own unique, personal understanding of the subject and expands his understanding at successive encounters.

At that time, Bruner made his impact through a couple of significant conference reports: *The Process of Education* (1960) of the Woods Hole conference and the *Basic Issues in the Teaching of English* (1959) of the Basic Issues conference. Though Bruner did not participate in the Basic Issues conference, its report mirrored Bruner’s ideas. On the issue of teaching composition, for example, the report tried to identify important research questions of the field: “Of what skills is the practical art of writing composed? Which of these can be taught most easily and most effectively at what levels? Can the teaching of these skills be distributed among the various levels?” (p. 9).

Throughout the report, two keys words are obvious: “sequential” and “cumulative”—a distinctive concept of the process of learning.
Subsequent English programs funded by the Project English or the National Defense Education Act of 1964 all reflected Bruner’s ideas one way or the other.

**Dartmouth Conference and the British Model**

American and British English teachers started official contact in the fifties. The British English teachers had their own organization: National Association of Teachers of English (NATE); American counterpart is the NCTE. At first, they had joint meetings on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). As early as 1957, there was a proposal on a joint conference on teaching English to native speakers. In 1964, NATE president Boris Ford attended the NCTE annual conference and sparked a renewed interest in a joint conference. Then, next year, the idea became a reality.

The joint NATE and NCTE conference of 1965 initiated a historically significant seminar next year in Dartmouth College. The month-long seminar in Dartmouth brought in about fifty specialists in teaching elementary, secondary, and college English. The seminar introduced stimulating views about teaching English and left a profound new perspective on American participants.

Next year, 1967, the American National Study of High School English Programs extended its survey subjects to British schools. Its experienced observers visited 42 British schools in the spring of 1967 and were also left with a stimulating impression. They, too, felt that the British model had much to offer to American schools.

The British model was actually based on the cognitive psychology, similar to the ideas Bruner had been preaching. Actually, the ideas were not new—all based on the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky—what was new was just that the British had been able to put the ideas into curriculum design and classroom practices. The effects of the British programs on English teachers and students demonstrated clear advantages over what American models had
been able to offer.

The British model focused the center of instruction on the personal and linguistic developments of the child, away from the concern of the demands of subject matters. Because the cognitive psychology stresses the connection between thought and language in the process of a child’s development, this belief places English at the center of school curriculum, from kindergarten all the way to secondary school. Thought and language are not two separate entities developing along individual, separate paths. They stimulate each other and help shape each other into being. Therefore, there are distinctive mental and linguistic developmental characteristics at every stage of a child’s growth.

This close mash between cognitive theories and classroom practices in Britain naturally gave American counterparts great hope and aspiration. They had always hoped for such a goal, now the British were offering a practical model2.

One more convincing merit of the British model is that its innovative and energetic programs also include junior high level students. Traditionally, most educators paid attention to secondary schools only. The primary reason was that secondary schools tended to respond and react to the theoretical developments in colleges—college entrance examination must had played a role. New theories or researches generally were initiated in colleges and their findings and practices almost always trickled down to secondary schools. For students in the junior high level, they were always too far away from the rigor of colleges and too young to be initiated in the requirements of discipline. There were programs for them, but not a guiding philosophy.

The connection between mental, linguistic, and emotional growths

2 Just a few years ago, NCTE had worked very hard to prove the worth of English so that it could receive federal funding. The National Defense Education Act had not started including English in its funding until 1964. Now this British model clearly shows that English should play a central role, instead of just struggling to survive.
clearly demonstrated in the British model for junior high level students struck American observers especially. The British program offered these students “improvised drama, imaginative writing, personal response to literature, and a large amount of informal classroom discussion. Instruction is centered on the pupil-his interests, his response, his view of the world” (Squire & Applebee, 1969, p. 52).3

In essence, the British model demonstrated that student is the center of school curriculum, not the content of subject matters. Content plays the role of providing students materials to experience for themselves in a variety of contexts so that they can experiment, test, and explore with their thinking and language. In this process, students learn and grow, intellectually, linguistically, and emotionally. Therefore, the process and the activities take the center stage of instruction, not the content nor the requirements of the discipline.

The teacher provides a learning environment with activities for students to explore with their minds and language; the teachers sustains this learning process by guiding and encouraging students to explore in a variety of contexts and through different skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Instead of dispensing judgments, “the teacher must accept the tentative and incomplete response as part of the process of choice, a testing out of a particular mode of thought of expression which it would be perfectly legitimate for the student to abandon in midstream” (Applebee, 1974, p. 230).

This new role of teacher was most evident on composition instruction. The British teachers put much emphasis on the act of writing and do not necessarily read students’ papers, whereas the American teachers traditionally practiced the “pattern of write, grade, revise” (Applebee, p. 230). American teachers found their strict attentions to formats and organization in secondary

3 Squire and Applebee had co-authored *High School English Instruction Today: The National Study of High School English Programs* (1968) in the previous year, so they were quite familiar with problems of American English education. Their findings in British carried a lot of weight.
composition instruction fared no better than British process-oriented approach. While teaching composition was viewed as a “service course” (Kitzhaber, 1962, p. 481) in America, the British counterpart obviously had no such ill feeling.

**New Rhetoric in Colleges**

Changes in high schools could not have taken place without a corresponding change of heart in colleges. As Bruner’s idea of the process of learning was spreading in early sixties, college rhetoric courses were also beginning to hear new voices. Starting in the fifties, from the University of Chicago, with the renewed call for rhetoric emphasizing “invention” as the primary character of rhetoric, in sixties there was the call for a “New Rhetoric,” emphasizing the process of learning.

In my previous papers (Chen, 2005, 2006) there are discussions about college English department’s persistent attempts to rid themselves off the burden of teaching composition, except during the Depression and WWII. After WWII, student enrollment in colleges grew rapidly on account of GI Bill, English departments found a new sense of mission and renewed their attempts to get rid off the requirement of teaching composition. The departments saw teaching composition as a drain of its resources and damage to faculty member’s professional career. Specifically, in the eyes of English professors, teaching composition made English professors “composition slaves” (Estrich, 1955, p. 87).

By 1960’s, targeting Freshman English for elimination became almost a ritual in college English communities. Albert R. Kitzhaber (1963) surveyed one hundred college English department courses and found a puzzling trend of shifting the responsibility of teaching composition to high schools:

1. Decreasing number of remedial courses.
2. Replacing regular course hours with time in writing labs or clinics, whose primary objective was on grammar and usage. Some colleges
even eliminated writing labs or clinics.

3. Offering more elective English courses designed for advanced students at the expense of regular or remedial courses for student in need of help. Such enriching courses generally oriented toward literature—shifting toward the ideal of liberal education at the beginning of the century⁴.

Kitzhaber (1962) found while composition instruction in high schools was responding to student and society needs and making progress, college composition instruction remained the same. The Current-Traditional method still dominated the course, neglecting advances in rhetoric and linguistics and emphasizing grammar, superficial correctness, modes of discourse, and topics of “things in general.” It seems that the primary responsibility of college composition was to be a “service course” just “to remedy deficiencies of earlier instruction, just to help students write well enough so that they can pursue their other college studies without making gross errors in usage and expression” (p. 481).

In light of this trend, Kitzhaber proposed a New Rhetoric for composition to make up with the missing leg in the tripod. Similar to what New Critics to literature and Structural Linguistics to linguistics, Kitzhaber sought to reinvigorate composition to make it “a discipline that performs the invaluable function of helping the writer or speaker to find the subject-matter for a discourse, to evaluate and select and order it, and to give it fitting expression” (p. 481). Kitzhaber envisioned a course that “the quality of his (the student) thinking and of his written expression, together with the principles underlie both, is the central and constant concern” (p. 482). Therefore, Kitzhaber advocated such a course for every college students. Furthermore, he also advocated rhetoric courses and courses on teaching

⁴ Kitzhaber made this point clear in his 1962 article, in which he pointed out the purpose of these courses was to make them “a liberal subject, a cultural subject, for it helps to discipline thought and give form and point to its utterance” (p. 481).
students to write for every college and high school English teachers. Consequently, he urged English departments to encourage more studies in this field.

In *Perspectives on Teaching Composition*, Kitzhaber (1962) reported the summer composition workshops for high school teachers. Kitzhaber listed two important premises, following Bruner’s idea of the process of learning, of the workshops that would soon become common practices in many high schools:

1. In order for teachers themselves to acquaint the process of composing, they must become writers themselves first. The obvious purpose to make teachers “learn at first hand the nature of problems faced by any writer.”

2. Teachers learn to view composition not as a mechanical and practical skill, “but instead an important way to order experience, to discover ideas, and render them precise, and to give them effective utterance” (p. 441).

In a word, Kitzhaber advocated that composition “is intimately related to thought itself” (p. 442), so composition should be placed at the heart of education.

Many other influential scholars supported Kitzhaber’s view and joined the effort to help expand and consolidate the New Rhetoric: Wayne C. Booth (1965), Francis Lee Utley (1968), Kinneavy (1971)… et. al.. Kinneavy’s *A*

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5 The workshops were sponsored by the College Entrance Examination Board’s Commission on English. Started in the fifties, as a response to the National Defense Education Act of 1958, many study centers or summer workshops were created to help train high school English teachers.

6 The Dartmouth conference and subsequent visits took place between 1965 and 1967. As early as 1960 and 1962, the ideas of the process of learning, the discovery or invention as the heart of composition, and the close connection between thought and language were proposed by Bruner, Kitzhaver… et. al. What amazed American educators between 1965 and 1967 still, ought to be the fact that British were able to put theories and ideas into actual, effective curriculum designs and instructional practices.

7 This is a speech Booth delivered at the MLA meeting in 1964.
Theory of Discourse, according to Berlin: “was a monumental attempt to make sense out of the new interest in rhetoric, providing a historical, philosophical, and linguistic basis for discussions of rhetorical discourse” (p. 134). Berlin went on to praise that it “remains the best theoretical treatment of discourse theory and continues to provide a rich store of materials for informed research in the area” (p. 135).

At the same time, influential NCTE publications provided a rich ground for promoting ideas of the New Rhetoric. These publications were under the leadership of reform-minded people, like editors of College Composition and Communication Ken Macrorie (1962 -1964) and William Irmscher (1965-1973), and editors of College English James E. Miller Jr. (1960-1966), Richard Ohmann (1967-1972) and Alan Purves (1973-1978). From their positions as editor of College Composition and Communication and College English, they make available a variety of research studies promoting new ideas and help the establishment of a new rhetoric as a discipline.

On another front, there was a milestone in 1963. Research in Written Composition (1963) by Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowel Schoer represented a major step in the development of composition research. The book examined composition researches of the past decades—up until 1961—and came to a critical conclusion. It found many researches were poorly-conceived and many terms ill-defined. It questioned many conventions and assumptions taken for granted by many composition researches. The book was viewed as a wake-up call for the composition communities. Berlin (1987) described its significance:

The work signaled a new rigor in empirical research in rhetoric, making specific methodical recommendations for future studies, and reporting on studies considered exemplary. This volume led to the establishment in 1967 of the journal Research in the Teaching of English, with Braddock as its first editor (p. 135).
Here, let us see how the authors of the report describe the state of composition research before 1963:

Today's research in composition, taken as a whole, may be compared to chemical research as it emerged from the period of alchemy: some terms are being defined usefully, a number of procedures are being refined, but the field as a whole is laced with dreams, prejudices, and makeshift operations. Not enough investigators are really informing themselves about the procedures and results of previous research before embarking on their own. Too few of them conduct pilot experiments and validate their measuring instruments before undertaking an investigation. Too many seem to be bent more on obtaining an advanced degree or another publication than on making a genuine contribution to knowledge, and a fair measure of the blame goes to the faculty adviser or journal editor who permits or publishes such irresponsible work. And far too few of those who have conducted an initial piece of research follow it with further exploration or replicate the investigations of others. Composition research, then, is not highly developed. If researchers wish to give it strength and depth, they must reexamine critically the structure and techniques of their studies (p. 5-6).

Put it in today’s context, it seems that not much has changed in the academic community.

**Linguistics Influences on Composition**

The subject of Linguistics is at once exciting and, at the same time, perplexing. It has made distinctive impact on language studies in general by bringing attention to the relationship between linguistic form and meaning. Indeed, theories of linguistics have provided new, valuable perspectives on
teaching language, replacing the traditional orthodox view of grammar and usage. Since late seventies into nineties, linguistics has developed into diversified fields—psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, semiotics…et. al.. This development further enriches the perspectives on language and rhetoric.

On the other hand, its intransigent position on linguistic makes it difficult, if not impossible, to accept the notion that language is composed of more than form only and, hence, makes its claim of a new theory on rhetoric somewhat restricted. In order to make itself a valid, independent discipline, linguistics has attempted to link up with other academic fields, like psychology and sociology, to offer itself as the key to any field related to language. Its intransigent hold on linguistics, however, prevents it from developing an overall theory covering rhetoric or discourse. In the end, linguistics inadvertently makes its claims on language studies a zero-sum game for teachers and students. So, the excitement and puzzlement go on.

Notwithstanding, linguistics did make distinctive, lasting impacts on composition instruction during 1960’s and 1970’s. This section will make a brief introduction to these linguistic contributions.

Francis Christensen no doubt made distinctive impact on composition instruction. He made contribution by focusing attention on the relationship between the different forms of sentence and paragraph and the meaning they create. Christensen stressed the generative power⁸ of using modifiers and levels of generality to add direction of movement, meaning, and texture to sentences. Instead of practicing sentence patterns as cold and lifeless sentences, he advocated that “composition is essentially a process of addition” (Christensen, 1970. p. 142), through which the writer expands and explores his ideas by manipulating the modifiers.

By cumulating layers of modifiers, a sentence, so claims Christensen,

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⁸ Christensen, in his 1970 article, claims that he had used the term “generative” before the generative grammar appeared.
becomes dynamic, not static, and reflects the writer’s probing mind. This new perspective opened a new door for high school composition instruction to look at how linguistic forms like sentences and paragraphs can generate meaning.


Another significant impact on composition instruction in this period is the development of sentence-combining techniques, a product of the transformational grammar. Its basic premise is on the relationship between forms of sentence construction and syntactical maturity. Students learning composition will benefit from the ability to produce sentences of varying syntactical maturity. In order for them to learn how to produce sentences of higher syntactical maturity, they start by combining two or more simple sentences into a complex sentence.

This technique enjoyed wide acceptance by some college and high school teachers, but also received criticisms for its static practices. Once more, the controversy derives more from if linguistic techniques have the right to occupy the stage of composition instruction. As Peter Elbow (1985) cautions:

It’s not a matter of either/or—of choosing between learning to transform one’s syntax or to leave it alone—or even stressing one process over the other…. Therefore we need to teach both leaving syntax alone and manipulating syntax. And we need to know how to live with opposites (p. 245).

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9 Just to illustrate the point this paper made at the beginning of this section, there were claims that Christensen had developed “the new rhetoric” (Berlin, p. 136). Christensen only dealt with sentence and paragraph, yet claims of “the new rhetoric” were made.
Unfortunately, history has not been on Elbow’s side.

In the Dec. 8, 1975 issue, Newsweek’s cover story was: Why Johnny Can’t Write? This was the first of a series of Newsweek articles discussing the demise of high school students’ poor writing performance. The articles caused a stir in the nation and make English language skills a hot educational topic again.

III. Conclusion

1960’s and 1970’s brought in quite a few new thinking. Not coincidentally, this was also a time of so-called “revolution” for the young generation, but “social turmoil” for the establishment. The state of composition instruction in universities as well as in high schools was also experiencing such a perplexing situation. New ideas and practices pointing directly toward the heart of human were introduced to America, while, on the other hand, the result of classroom practices remained largely the same.

In retrospect, 1960’s and 1970’s should be viewed as but a step in the process of a long journey. There were new ideas, but most of them were not tested for sound practice. There were new, practical classroom approaches, but the society as a whole remained largely skeptical. Only time will heal.
References

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