

# Controversies in Second Language Writing: A Critique of Common Assumptions



**Controversies in Second Language Writing, Second Edition: Dilemmas and Decisions in Research and Instruction (The Michigan Series on Teaching Multilingual Writers)** by Christine Pearson Casanave

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Second language writing has long been a topic of debate and controversy. While there is general agreement on the importance of writing in second language acquisition, there is less consensus on how writing should be taught and assessed, and what constitutes good writing in a second language.

In this article, we will explore some of the key controversies in second language writing, challenging common assumptions and offering alternative perspectives. We will begin by discussing the nature of writing and its role in second language acquisition. We will then examine some of the specific controversies surrounding the teaching and assessment of second language writing.

## **The Nature of Writing and Its Role in Second Language Acquisition**

Writing is a complex cognitive activity that involves a number of different skills, including planning, organizing, drafting, revising, and editing. It is also a social activity, in that it is often used to communicate with others.

In second language acquisition, writing plays a vital role in developing fluency and accuracy. By writing, learners can practice using the target language in a meaningful way, and they can also develop their critical thinking skills. Writing can also help learners to develop their cultural awareness, as they learn about the conventions of writing in the target language culture.

## **Controversies in the Teaching and Assessment of Second Language Writing**

There are a number of controversies surrounding the teaching and assessment of second language writing. These controversies include:

- The role of grammar in writing
- The use of error correction
- The assessment of writing

## **The Role of Grammar in Writing**

One of the most controversial issues in second language writing is the role of grammar. Some teachers believe that grammar is essential for good writing, while others believe that it is less important than other factors, such as fluency and creativity.

There is no easy answer to this question. The role of grammar in writing will vary depending on the purpose of the writing and the level of the learner. For example, a learner who is writing a formal essay will need to have a good understanding of grammar. However, a learner who is writing a personal journal may not need to be as concerned with grammar.

### **The Use of Error Correction**

Another controversial issue is the use of error correction. Some teachers believe that error correction is essential for helping learners to improve their writing, while others believe that it can be counterproductive.

Again, there is no easy answer to this question. The use of error correction will vary depending on the purpose of the writing and the level of the learner. For example, a learner who is writing a formal essay will benefit from error correction. However, a learner who is writing a personal journal may not need as much error correction.

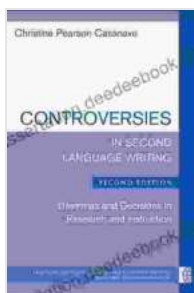
### **The Assessment of Writing**

The assessment of writing is another controversial issue. Some teachers believe that writing should be assessed using a holistic approach, while others believe that it should be assessed using an analytic approach.

A holistic approach to assessment focuses on the overall quality of the writing, while an analytic approach focuses on specific aspects of the writing, such as grammar, vocabulary, and organization. There is no easy answer to the question of which approach is better. The best approach will vary depending on the purpose of the assessment and the level of the learner.

The controversies surrounding second language writing are complex and multifaceted. There is no easy answer to any of these controversies. However, by understanding the different perspectives on these issues, we can make more informed decisions about how to teach and assess second language writing.

It is important to remember that there is no one right way to teach or assess second language writing. The best approach will vary depending on the purpose of the writing, the level of the learner, and the individual teacher's beliefs and values.



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