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Can we reconcile divergent theoretical and methodological approaches to writing?

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Because of its historical roots, research on second language writing and multilingual writing has been approached from many theoretical and epistemological perspectives. Specifically, researchers from a second language acquisition (SLA) perspective tend to draw on more experimental and cognitively-oriented approaches while those from a composition perspective tend to draw on qualitative and socially-oriented approaches. These lines of research, in my opinion, have only diverged more in the last decade by drawing not only different data collection and analytical methods but also different theories that do not consider broader views of writing. Furthermore, they tend to be distinct in the contexts and populations studied. Fortunately, we can find complementary studies on various topics (e.g., peer feedback, corpus use, voice, incorporation of sources, timed writing) that show that the approaches are not incompatible if we are willing to do the work to bring them together. After providing examples of such studies, I will then focus on recent mixed methods studies. I consider whether or not they offer models of how second language writing researchers might bring together cognitively and socially-oriented research. Finally, I will draw on a set of research agendas from an SLA-oriented perspective (from Manchón & Polio, forthcoming). Using examples of research tasks from these agendas, I will suggest specific mixed methods studies that can broaden our perspective on what is involved in second language/multilingual writing.