



# The Iranian Academicians' Strategies in Writing English Papers

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## Abstract

Academicians are identified with their papers and expertise in writing scholarly articles, either for promotion or for satisfying their prestige. Iranian academic members are expected to win a justifiable stance by the quality and quantity of their publications and presentations. Regrettably through previous studying about second language writing, any studies haven't been dedicated to the style of writing articles, which are used by academic members. Former studies on second language writing indicate that style in academic paper writing is most likely ignored. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of mind translation strategy among Iranian academic members for expressing their own opinion through writing second language academic papers. The present paper has based its hypothesis on three levels of strategies, effective in writing academic papers, namely: 1-Do Iranian academicians follow specific strategies in writing their academic papers? 2-What role does translation play as a strategy in their writing academic papers? 3-Do they feel a need for a strategy shift in their academic paper writing? Data elicited based on survey and corpora analysis in form of CBDTS- on micro and macro levels, are put into matrices and their analyses are supportive of academicians' reliance on different types of mental translation use and their shift toward authentic writing after receiving feedback from their reviewers.

**Keywords:** CBDTS, micro level, macro level, mental translation, strategy shift

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduce the Problem

Good essay writing is a skill to acquire rather than learn. Styles in essay writing are different from individual to individual and depend on one's talent in essay writing; and how to write an academic paper is an indication of the identity as well as proficiency level of any academic member. Unfortunately, in spite of the great progress made through second language writing strategies model in previous studies; little attention has been paid to how academicians Viable use of proper strategies during academic writing in the second language.

### 1.2 Explore Importance of the Problem

The present study has concentrated on the analysis of Iranian academic paper's writing effects in quasi-natural settings with intention to get their papers published or presented in overseas conferences on the developmental scheme of writing strategy use. To this end, after a pilot study, the following research question has been investigated: "Does faculty members' overseas paper presentations affect their writing strategy use?"

By considering the intention of the present study, the researcher tries to (1) unravel what takes place in the L2 academic writer's mind when they are writing in the second language (L2), (2) uncover what makes one L2 academic writer a prodigious writer and another a poor one, in fact, these differences may be significantly related to potential strategies use through their writing process (distinctive writing achievement).

This research, especially by demonstrating documented academic essays, tries to fill in the gaps in former studies documented in L2 academic writing and to practically engage academicians in using proper strategies in their academic writing to make reliable performances. The researcher's reliance on corpora analysis, as the favored technique, was to concentrate on micro and macro levels in their mental translation strategy, being followed by the qualitative survey and via online questionnaire. Indeed, think- aloud protocol has had the main role in conducting the research to unveil mental activity (introspection) of the writers through writing in spite of its being time consuming for implementation and analysis. On the other hand, because think-aloud writing study has limited generalizability, corpora analysis is used for documentation in this survey as another method.

### 1.3 Research Questions

- 1-Do academicians follow specific strategies in writing their academic papers?
- 2-What role does translation play as a strategy in their writing academic papers?
- 3-Do they feel a need for a strategy shift in their academic paper writing?

### 1.4 Research Hypothesis

- 1-Academicians use particular writing strategies in promoting content generating and planning during writing.
- 2-There isn't any relationship between proficiency level of academic writers and better performing in producing effective writing academic papers in the second language.
- 3-Proficient writers don't use translation strategy from L1 to L2 for transferring their thoughts in writing academic papers in the second language.

## 2. Theoretical and methodological issues

In spite of basic similarities between first and second language composing procedure, recent studies have disclosed that significant differences such as cognitive, linguistic, discourse, genre and audience exist between first and second language writing system. Paying attention to the differences between first and second language writing, L2 learners compel themselves to match with the principles of second language writing for writing tasks. There are two main foci in this area of study: the role of L1 in L2 writing, and writing strategies.

Kroll claimed that "we [still] have very little information on how people actually learn to write in second languages or how teaching might influence this" (Kroll, 2003, p.6). ESL teachers and SLA researchers have long been aware that ESL learners often have difficulties with academic writing in English (Lieber, 1980; Reid, 1989). According to Raimes, "all of us who have tried to write something in a second language ... sense that the process of writing in an L2 is startlingly different from writing in our L1" (Raimes, 1985). Likewise, Aliakbari (2002) argued that L2 writing ability had no meaningful relationship with L1 writing. L2 writing ability and L1 writing ability were two separate tasks; that is, writing in L2 is a language-specific phenomenon, not a writing problem.

These studies suggest that learners, especially those with inadequate proficiency in L2, rely on their L1 to achieve their goals and to solve any problems they encounter when composing in a new language. Thus, a major problem for these learners is how to overcome the negative effects of "transfer, or interference, of their L1 writing conventions in L2 writing" (Kubota, 1998, p.69).

Since the 1980s, a great deal of research on L2 writing has focused on the process because the product-oriented research cannot reveal the use of L1 in the whole process of L2 writing. Apart from that, a renewed attention has also been directed to the use of L1 in the process of composing in a second language after a long-time criticism of L1 use by L2 learners in the process.

Fulcher (1997) through his studies implied that L2 writers are thinking in different languages at different times and are translating while composing (Fulcher, 1997). Writing protocol studies have shown L2 writers revert to their L1s as they compose in English (Leeds, 1996).

Translation is a strategy that is used more by less skilled writers. Gosden (1996) presented interview data from a group of Japanese novice researchers who were asked to comment on their writing practices in preparing their first scientific research articles to be published in English. Evidences showed that some of them would write an entire paper in L1 and then translate this directly into the L2, using a phrase-by-phrase translation strategy.

According to Talebinezhad and Aliakbari (2002), the type of English favored by Iranian EFL/ESL users is supposed to be English as an international auxiliary language in Iran; hence, the strategy used in writing academic papers should be necessarily a unique one, basically translation.

Academic writing is an intricate activity that needs academicians have declarative knowledge about how to organize different parts of paper writing and the procedural knowledge of how to follow the values and goals of community in order to communicate information to a particular audience. Through the process of writing, the writer improves his/her thought and ideas to transfer his/her thinking, ideas and new findings in illustrating a discussion or argument within a particular field. Academicians cannot usually express their own ideas and findings within a particular discipline domain because there are particular gaps between what is traditionally known and what is expected in the essay writing situation. Subsequently, they need to develop their knowledge about linguistic competence in terms of appropriate vocabulary and writing style and familiarity with the writing modes and skills required in the academic culture.

Kaplan (1966) contends that many students in ESL programs write texts, which are significantly different from those written by native speakers of English. He notes that the writing problems, which L2 learners encounter, are not merely a byproduct of structural interference from their native languages; rather, they are result of transfer of rhetorical strategies and rhetorical patterns from their native cultures.

Undoubtedly, culture affects the use of language in writing because each culture has its own genre of writing. L2 writer's text is intuitively recognized from that of an L1 writer by native speakers because L2 writers convey their native conceptual pattern in the mind to L2 writing position and they present written ideas in different ways from native speakers. The link between rhetorical features and writers' educational and cultural background can also be an important consideration in writing L2 papers because rhetorical features are culture-dependent.

Swales (1990) and Raimes (1991, 1998) state that students may be able to write well if they are exposed to a variety of genres of writing, which include flyers, magazines, articles and books. By examining a variety of written texts, students' awareness can be raised with regard to the way words, structures and genre contribute to purposeful writing. They can also be aware of different types of textual organization, which can affect L2 students' composing process. Models of text analysis, which can help L2 writers see how grammatical features are used in authentic discourse contexts, can also be used.

Similarly, Kaplan (1966) asserts that differences in L2 writing might reflect different writing conventions that are learnt in L1 culture and may interfere with L2 writing. In contrast, some researchers (e.g., Cumming, 1989; Matsumoto, 1995) have claimed that L1/L2 writers may oscillate between the two languages whenever the need arises. L2 writers may bring their own sets of culturally and cognitively defined criteria to writing based on their L1 disciplinary, cultural and cognitive experiences internalized as different writing patterns.

Since, writers from different cultures present written ideas in different ways, L2 writer audience sense may be culturally different from L1 writers (Silva and Matsuda, 2001).

In fact, the focus is on how a community defines writers and writing; how texts represent that community; how the community, its discourse, and disciplinary knowledge are constituted and reconstituted; and how participants in discursive practices form and are formed by these practices and the disciplinary and professional formations in which they participate (Kennedy, 1998).

In particular, research has been done in the last decade in Canada, Iceland, Japan, and the USA indicates two different views:

Position One: The composing process in first language (L1) is different from the composing process in the second language (L2) (Silva, 1993).

Position Two: Writers transfer their writing strategies from their first to their second language provided that they possess second language grammatical proficiency (Berman, 1994). Moreover, L2 writing strategies are similar to L1 writing strategies (Matsumoto, 1995).

In general, proficient L2 learners do not depend heavily on the L1 to drive the writing process because they have a sufficient level of L2 automaticity and knowledge to think and plan in the L2 (Jones and Tetroe, 1987).

However, lower L2 proficiency writers rely more heavily on their L1 during the writing process in order to sustain the process and prevent a complete breakdown in language (Arndt, 1987; Cumming, 1989; Raimes, 1985; Uzawa and Cumming, 1989).

In other words, translation benefits L2 writers, especially those with a low L2 proficiency. Thus the researchers thought it would be misleading to advise L2 students to refrain from using their L1 in L2 writing. Proficient writers do not translate from L1 to L2 (Matsumoto, 1995).

Concluded L2 writing research has indicated that L2 writers use their first language (L1) while writing in L2 (some researchers such as, Friedlander, 1990; Krapels, 1990; Uzawa, 1996; Woodall, 2002). Investigations clearly have shown that through organizing a text, L2 writers use their L1 strategies (Beare, 2000; Jones and Tetroe, 1987; Krapels, 1990; Uzawa and Cumming, 1989; Wang, 2003; Woodall, 2002), create ideas or expand text (Beare, 2000; Beare and Bourdages, 2007; Knutson, 2006; Krapels, 1990; Qi, 1998; Roca de Larios *et al.*, 1999; Uzawa and Cumming, 1989; Wang, 2003; Whalen and Me'nard, 1995; Woodall, 2002), or for coming over syntactic, semantic and pragmatic issues (Beare, 2000; Centeno-Corte's and Jime'nezJime'nez, 2004; Cumming, 1989; Jones and Tetroe, 1987; Lay, 1982; Wang, 2003; Woodall, 2002).

A translator must be aware of genre, since language features will often vary depending on which genre is being translated. Culture affects the use of language in many ways and contrastive rhetoric research has discovered that each culture has its own patterns of discourse. Therefore, L2 writers are likely to transfer their native schemata to L2 writing situations (Hyland, 2002). No one except Wenden (1991) and Riazi (1997) has classified writing strategies from a theoretical stance. Furthermore, the taxonomies of writing strategies proposed by Wenden and Riazi are incomplete because they do not take strategies practicality and viability into account. ESL teachers and SLA researchers have long been aware that ESL learners often have difficulties with academic writing in English (Lieber, 1980; Reid, 1989).

Therefore, these theoretical and methodological problems show that because second language writers, are less skilled, less perfect and be less practical writers than L1 writers, they transfer subconsciously writing conventions of their L1 into L2 writing when confront with difficulties in L2 writing. The pilot study showed academicians start with translation as a strategy but they shift to other strategies after receiving feedback from their papers' editors. Subsequently, academic writers become aware of the rhetorical differences in discourse and genre through exposure to academic essays and receiving feedback from their papers' editors.

### **3. Research Method**

#### *3.1 Purpose*

This research intends to shed some light on the strategies, favored by Iranian academicians in writing their papers.

#### *3.2 Design*

With the intention of exploring the current strategies, which are popular in L2 writing, this study is prompted by the

belief of what takes place in the L2 writers' mind through writing, which resembles mental translation. Usually, L2 writers write down what comes to their mind with translation creativity and then extend the words and phrases to cover the page length. In this study, the researcher intends to highlight strategies, favored by Iranian academic members in writing English papers. The pilot study shows they start with translation as a strategy but they shift to other strategies after receiving feedback from their papers' editors. The finding of this study will pave the path to minimize trial and error technique, either hard copy format or mental translation one, in writing future English academic paper writing.

### 3.3 Participants

The participants in this qualitative survey consisted of 30 academicians that were selected based on the index of their progressive presentations and publications to show their mental task in academic paper writing, majored in Science and Engineering and from different disciplines, either from state or non-state funded Iranian universities; all have received their Ph.D. from Iranian Institutions. The number and level of their paper presentations are key factors in their selection. Possibility of their being connected to on-line system is another prominent factor in their participation to the study.

### 3.4 Method

To elicit data, the researcher relies on two methods; one method is a qualitative survey and the second one is corpora analysis. Both of these two methods were used to open a window into the mind of the academicians to let us investigate how they come to the decision stage in selecting the text format.

### 3.5 Instruments and Materials

To elicit reported strategy use from the target population, a semi-opened on line questionnaire of 30 items with five open-ended questions, in synchronous L1/L2 format was designed, including biographical questions, their attitudes toward English as well as questions concerning their use of communicative strategies.

In the past few decades, a couple of research into the writers' strategy use in the L2 writing particularly have been performed mainly on the basis of think-aloud protocols. Indeed, think-aloud protocol has had the main role in conducting the research to unveil mental activity (introspection) of the writers through writing in spite of its being time consuming for implementation and analysis (by SPSS software ver.18).

On the other hand, because think-aloud writing study has limited generalizability, another method as corpora analysis was used for documentation in this survey.

Therefore, corpora analysis was used as a second method in this survey, which is based on CBDTS (corpus based descriptive translation studies); corpus analysis method in this research was performed to confirm the construct validity of the questionnaire. In corpus analysis, parallel texts are needed for text analysis; therefore, academicians were asked to furnish us two essays: one as their first overseas' presentation and the other one as their latest overseas' presentation in order to provide an overall idea about their writing strategies in the L2.

Corpora analysis of the two parallel texts was done on the basis of CBDTS on two levels, micro level and macro level. Micro level refers to surface structure of the text, in which elements such as grammar, vocabulary, punctuations and text, in general were focused. Macro level of CBDTS refers to deep structure of text such as style, genre, texture, utterance meaning and discourse analysis.

## 4. Results

The pilot study in this research indicates 98% failure in data elicitation via interview technique. In the face-to-face interview, the candidates announced their full proficiency in writing academic papers to be published overseas. They defended their papers by announcing their papers having been published and that was enough for them. The qualitative data from completed questionnaire were converted into numerical matrices and they were analyzed, as it appears in Table 1. The analysis proves that 93% of the candidates did not have a clear understanding of writing academic papers in their first presentations but 67% of them have learned the meaning of authentic writing in their post presentations. Results taken from corpora analysis confirm a strategy shift for 69% of the candidates through maturation process.

Table 1. The frequency and percentage of qualitative data from answered questionnaire. Each cell represents the number and percentage of people that have chosen the desired question.

	No idea	Perfectly disagree	disagree	agree	Perfectly agree		No idea	Perfectly disagree	disagree	agree	Perfectly agree
Q1	1 3.3%	3 10.0%	0 0.0%	15 50.0%	11 36.7%	Q16	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	3 10.0%	18 60.0%	9 30.0%
Q2	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	19 63.3%	11 36.7%	Q17	3 10.0%	3 10.0%	10 33.3%	12 40.0%	2 6.7%
Q3	2 6.7%	6 20.0%	3 10.0%	8 26.7%	11 36.7%	Q18	3 10.0%	7 23.3%	7 23.3%	11 36.7%	2 6.7%
Q4	2 6.7%	0 0.0%	1 3.3%	16 53.3%	11 36.7%	Q19	3 10.0%	0 0.0%	2 6.7%	14 46.7%	11 36.7%
Q5	1 3.3%	0 0.0%	4 13.3%	14 46.7%	11 36.7%	Q20	2 6.7%	5 16.7%	6 20.0%	12 40.0%	5 16.7%
Q6	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	11 36.7%	19 63.3%	Q21	4 13.3%	3 10.0%	6 20.0%	11 36.7%	6 20.0%
Q7	8 26.7%	0 0.0%	3 10.0%	8 26.7%	11 36.7%	Q22	3 10.0%	3 10.0%	9 30.0%	13 43.3%	2 6.7%

Q8	4 13.3%	11 36.7%	5 16.7%	7 23.3%	3 10.0%	Q23	3 10.0%	1 3.3%	4 13.3%	21 70.0%	1 3.3%
Q9	7 23.3%	1 3.3%	0 0.0%	15 50.0%	7 23.3%	Q24	4 13.3%	6 20.0%	10 33.3%	8 26.7%	2 6.7%
Q10	5 16.7%	4 13.3%	5 16.7%	7 23.3%	9 30.0%	Q25	2 6.7%	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	14 46.7%	12 40.0%
Q11	3 10.0%	1 3.3%	2 6.7%	14 46.7%	10 33.3%	Q26	1 3.3%	0 0.0%	2 6.7%	18 60.0%	9 30.0%
Q12	3 10.0%	0 0.0%	3 10.0%	10 33.3%	14 46.7%	Q27	1 3.3%	0 0.0%	1 3.3%	13 43.3%	15 50.0%
Q13	4 13.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	7 23.3%	19 63.3%	Q28	3 10.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	15 50.0%	12 40.0%
Q14	6 20.0%	0 0.0%	8 26.7%	10 33.3%	6 20.0%	Q29	3 10.0%	0 0.0%	4 13.3%	16 53.3%	7 23.3%
Q15	1 3.3%	2 6.7%	5 16.7%	9 30.0%	13 43.3%	Q30	2 6.7%	6 20.0%	2 6.7%	15 50.0%	5 16.7%

<sup>a</sup> Q1 to Q30 refers to question 1 to question 30 in questionnaire.

#### Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	mean1	2.8952	30	.43579	.07956
	mean2	3.9576	30	.42972	.07846

Mean 1: shows the questions in the questionnaire which easily reflected translation style used by academicians in their first presentation

Mean 2: shows the questions in the questionnaire which related to authentic writing style used by academicians in their post presentation

#### Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	mean1 & mean2	30	.085	.653

The correlation between mean 1 and mean 2 is 0.85\

#### Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
mean1 - mean2	-1.06234	.58529	.10686	-1.28089	-.84379	-9.941	29	.000

Based on Paired Samples Test between mean 1 and mean 2 was done by degree of freedom=29 and p-value=0< $\alpha$ =0.05 showed that proficient academicians have sooner strategy shift to authentic writing.

## 5. Discussion

The fact is that academicians have to write argumentative essays in their disciplines, so they have to write essays in "essay-like," format, which means with governed conventional genre for expressing a degree of critical thinking and sustaining a coherent, reasoned argument. According to the explanation set out formerly in this study, the function of genre in scientific papers is not only directly related to special language (register), which every discipline needs in special context, but also the relationship between different parts of an article, which are written by academic members, and the reader in communication event.

Firstly, regarding to the texts, the finding of this study demonstrates that Iranian academic members' failure in publishing their papers is relatable to make errors at the sentence level, (articles, modifiers, wordiness, passive voice

use, conjunctions, nouns, incorrect use of numbers, incorrect use of prepositions, pronoun agreement, use of adjectives and adverbs, comparing two or more things, faulty parallelism, incorrect use of negatives, use of qualifiers and quantifiers, subject and verb agreement, verb agreement, verb form use, modal verbs, conditional sentences, etc.), which were expected to overcome these grammatical and sentence structure errors by themselves as soon as possible. Poor grammar will necessarily undermine the writer credibility more swiftly than any other single problem because readers become frustrated and prevent them from gleaned desired information.

Secondly, likewise, punctuation, act of placing punctuation marks within text in order to divide or clarify text, is not a major academic problem. Definitely, this weakness will be disappeared through reading more scientific notes and more writing performances.

Thirdly, it became clear that problems of quoting, citing and plagiarism can be easily risked the credibility and validity source of the writer's ideas.

Lastly, by reading and paying attention to errors, existed in their texts, the researcher could easily deduce that the writers wrote down what comes to their mind on paper. In such a way that sense of translation can be easily smelled out and focus of their mind on sentence level for conveying their own ideas alone in words without the ability to relate their thought to the main idea and previous literature. The evidences imply the academicians' poor knowledge of how academic texts are created and how genre makes such a text identifiable.

This documented corpora analysis helps the researcher to practically show every challenging problem, that many Iranian academicians are confronted with in their writing papers, which include their inability to relate their thoughts to the main idea and noted facts. This problematic issue is very rampant among academicians because of lack of mastery to write argumentative essay. In fact, the weaknesses in this area could be returned back to the loss of academicians' knowledge about genre: coherent argument and rhetorical organization, which would be significantly improved through their future performances.

## 6. Conclusion

This study spotlights specific strategies based on think-aloud protocol analyses, as direct observation, which Iranian academicians used for text organization in English academic papers, especially those with inadequate proficiency in writing L2 paper. The pilot study shows L2 writers usually write down what comes to their mind with translation creativity (text generation) and then extend the words and phrases (transcription) to build cohesive and coherent text. Corpora analysis clearly shows that mind translation strategy, which is usually used by inexperienced L2 writers without considering the style and genre, leads writer to state explicitly only in a separate sentence without any relationship to previous literature, what justifies conduction of research, and improperly publishing current research. Mind translation without explicitly giving sufficient detail forces the reader to figure out the authors' thought is ambiguous because of transition from one idea to another one.

Through qualitative survey and corpora analysis (the first and the latest paper) the results indicate that there seems to be a positive correlation between proficiency level of academic writers and better performance in producing effective writing academic papers in the second language. Proficient writers by considering that each journal has its own style; and observing writing style by analyzing published papers in their field in order to get familiar with the requirements and instructions for being published in the target journal. In fact, proficient writers believe that knowing and observing written style accordingly select how the journals enhance their credit positions.

As a matter of fact, academic writing is a developmental activity that means academicians try to improve and match writing strategies at different levels and in different subjects by becoming assimilative bilinguals through more international publishing and overseas' presentations.

Fortunately, academic writers feel a need to pay much attention to the significant role of citation for giving credit to their new ideas through their writing skill improvement and after receiving feedbacks from paper's editors. Therefore, academicians usually use citation/self-citation for the establishment of their reasoning new ideas.

Academic writers usually use fixed strategies such as rote memorization, plagiarism and mind translation in their first-essay writing, but through more writing L2 papers they cognitively change their writing strategies at expected situations that means writing tasks enforce academicians to change cognitively their strategies on what may be appropriate in one situation, may not be suitable in another context and discourse community. The results of this research found that there is a relationship between audience and the quality of writing.

### 6.1 Limitations of the current study

Several limitations to this pilot study need to be acknowledged. Firstly, from a methodological perspective, this study is based on a small number of Participants; therefore, more qualitative research is required to enhance the findings of this research. Secondly, this study is faced by several limitations in collecting the first and the latest academicians' essays for corpora analysis (unfortunately by the cultural norms in which academicians did not wish to share their writing experiences, in spite of their being kept anonymous). Thirdly, the design of this study is process-oriented and few studies have been done on a process-orientation basis in writing; subsequently any study in this field is valuable to increase the reliability and viability of this research. Lastly, through the use of questionnaire and the think-aloud protocol in this study, which is based on self-reporting, it may have limited information on writers' source use accurately or confidently when they are engaged in writing.

### 6.2 Recommendations for further research

By considering the design of this study that is process-oriented and no studies have already been done on a process-orientation basis on academicians' paper writing. It opens the horizons for further research in this skill.

The researcher recommends that further researches be undertaken in the following areas:

1-Study of the stages of how to improve original research finding

2-How to encourage the academic member to be more productive, rethink and revise their texts regularly, through metacognitive awareness.

3-Process-oriented approach be trailed by academicians in their ISI- paper writing

### 6.3 Suggested implications

The present study confirms previous findings and contributes additional evidences that suggest becoming a proficient writer in a second language is an ongoing process. In fact, academicians should empower themselves to make appropriate rhetorical decisions by becoming conscious of language-specific features of written discourse across languages in different contexts. On the other hand, the evidences from this study indicates, that the publication of research papers in international journals and workshops necessitates talent in publishing increase confidence in the Iranian academic members in their coming presentations. Alternatively, the finding of this study demonstrates that having their papers been published in international journals and receiving feedbacks from reviewers motivate academicians to get improved in their future writings. For them, it seems to be a road to success.

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