

# **The role of writing in learning less-commonly-taught languages in Turkey**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates language learners' perceptions of foreign language writing and how writing influences their language learning to write in non-Latin alphabets. While most research studies have focused on writing in commonly-taught languages, recently, L2 writing researchers have begun to call for the importance of researching the language learning and writing experiences of speakers who learn less-commonly taught languages. To address this issue, this study investigates the role of writing in learning less-commonly-taught languages. The study was conducted at a large university in Istanbul, Turkey. Turkish students learning Arabic, Russian, and Chinese as foreign languages were surveyed and interviewed in different times of the semester. The results indicated that while lower level language learners stated the act of writing serves as the only way to memorize the characters, words, and sometimes sentences, higher level language learners talked about the role of communicative aspects of writing in their language learning processes.

*“Although the majority of the L2 writing literature has focused on ESL writing environments, L2 writing is a much broader phenomenon than writing in English as a second language. Around the world, people grapple with writing and teaching writing in various non-native languages in a variety of contexts, including many FL contexts... Awareness of how these influences impact L2 writing instruction – including ESL writing instruction—in a very broad range of contexts is an important precursor to development of an accurate and inclusive theory of L2 writing. (Reichelt, 2011, p. 17).”*

## 1. Introduction

Recently, second language (L2) writing specialists have drawn our attention to the importance of investigating writing in foreign language contexts (e.g. Manchón, 2009; Ortega, 2009) and expanding the scope of L2 writing beyond writing English as a second language (ESL) in order to fully grasp the issues and challenges in L2 writing (e.g. Reichelt, 2011). While much of the existing research on L2 writing has focused on learning and writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (e.g. Aliakbari, 2002; Hyland, 2005; Khuwailah & Al Shoumali, 2000; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008; Wang & Wen, 2002), there have recently been calls for research studies on the language learning and writing experiences of learners who learn less-commonly taught languages (e.g. Polio, 2013). While existing literature on EFL writing has provided us with foundation for further exploration of second language writing theory, research, and instruction, there still remains the need for developing an understanding and a recognition of writing in non-English foreign languages. As Cimasko and Reichelt (2011) emphasize, “the field of L2 writing will benefit from recognizing the continuing importance of issues related to writing in English as a foreign language—as well as other languages being taught around the world” (p. viii).

In an attempt to address this issue in foreign language (FL) writing literature, this study investigates the role of writing instruction in foreign languages that are under-researched, namely, Arabic, Chinese, and Russian, in an under-researched context, namely,

Turkey. More specifically, the present study focuses on students' perceptions of foreign language writing and how writing influences their language learning to write in non-Latin alphabets, syllabary-based, and logographic writing systems such as Arabic, Chinese, and Russian.

## 2. Literature Review

While most research on L2 writing literacy has focused on writing practices of second language writers in English language classrooms (e.g. Castro, 2004; Ellis & Yuan, 2004; Ferenz, 2005; Kamimura & Oi, 2001; Khaldieh, 2000; Khalil, 1999; Lee, 2005; Porte, 1997), and more recently, writing experiences of learners in commonly-taught language classes such as French (e.g. Chiang, 1999; Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001; Conroy, 2004; Keiken & Vedder, 2008; New, 1999), German (e.g. Thorson, 2000; Thorson, 2011), Spanish (Ruiz-Funes, 1999; Ruiz-Funes, 2001), and Italian (Keiken & Vedder, 2008), very few, if any, have focused on writing experiences of less commonly taught language learners. Existing literature on these less commonly taught languages has reported on writing in less commonly taught languages, mostly in U.S. settings (e.g. Yigitoglu & Reichelt, 2012, 2014).

At the same time, there have been recent calls for the need for further research on writing in EFL contexts in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of L2 writing. For example, Manchón, in the preface for one of the first edited books on FL writing, indicated that “[F]ailing to consider writing practices in FL settings badly distorts our understanding of L2 writing” (Manchón, 2009, pp. xiii). Similarly, Ortega (2009) underlined the importance of contextualized FL writing research to push the area of second language learning forward: “Good EFL writing research demands the mounting of knowledge about writing in a FL that is fully contextualized and capitalizes on diversity” (pp. 250). Even the researchers who reported teaching and writing instruction in less commonly taught languages in the United States called for future research studies that focused on “students’ needs and motivations

regarding FL writing, and research about the role that writing and writing instruction might play in the broader L2 curriculum” (Yigitoglu & Reichelt, 2012, pp. 74). This call is also voiced by scholars working in the interface between second language writing and second language acquisition. Polio (2013), for example, when suggesting future research in the acquisition of second language writing, indicated that “Although research on learning to read other scripts is common, the same is not true for writing. Replication of studies with writers learning new scripts would add to what we know about learning to write” (pp. 329).

As Polio (2013) points out, the issue of learning to write in such languages would advance our understanding of L2 writing. Manchón (2011), when explaining the general dimensions of L2 writing, makes an important distinction between two dimensions: (1) the learning-to-write dimension, which refers to the manner in which L2 users learn to express themselves in writing, and (2) the writing-to-learn dimension, which refers to the way in which L2 writing is used to advance areas other than writing, such as content knowledge (writing-to-learn content) or language knowledge and skills (writing-to-learn language). Researching these distinctions in L2 writing become even more crucial to push the area forward in writing in non-English foreign languages. As Hirvela points out, specifically referring to writing to learn content research, the scope of such research should be expanded to the FL contexts “though such opportunities may be limited due to the lack of situations in which these students can use foreign language writing beyond their language courses” (Hirvela, 2011, pp. 57). As Hirvela (2011) rightly acknowledges, there are some challenges in researching writing to learn content in FL writing. Despite the challenges, it still seems important to research these dimensions in FL writing in general, and the writing in less-commonly-taught languages in particular. As Yigitoglu and Reichelt (2012, 2014) explained, mainly referring to writing needs of Turkish learners in a U.S. university, learners in less-commonly-taught languages classrooms may indeed have a clear sense of their needs for writing in these languages. As a result, exploring the interplay of these dimensions in writing in less-commonly-taught languages can help us

advance our understanding regarding the learners' language learning processes in general and their L2 writing development in particular.

With these calls in mind, this research aimed to investigate the writing and writing instruction in in three FLs - namely Arabic, Chinese, and Russian - in Turkish context. In order to obtain contextually rich data, the present study integrated a combination of two methods—surveys and interviews—to determine the role of writing in Turkish students' learning Arabic, Chinese, and Russian. As mentioned earlier, this is an under-examined topic in L2 writing research, one that may help shed light on the role of writing in learning these languages. It may also highlight the complex interplay of perceptions and learning in an under-researched FL context. The questions guiding the data collection were:

1. From language learners' emic perspective, what role does writing play in their overall language learning processes?
2. From language learners' emic perspective, what are possible purposes for writing in the TL(s)?

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1 Instructional context and participants**

The present research was conducted at a large university in Istanbul, Turkey. The university, at the time of the study, had wide range of undergraduate programs as well as graduate programs (i.e. 53 undergraduate, 46 masters', and 13 doctoral programs) under eight faculties, three graduate institutes, and Schools of Applied Sciences and Health Sciences. In addition to these programs, the university implemented various education centers such as Russian Culture Center and Confucius Institute to expose learners with extra-curricular activities. The university also retained different research centers in diverse areas (e.g. Center for Eurasian Studies, Center for Intercultural Dialogue and Studies, Center for European Union Studies, etc.) for academic staff interested in conducting research studies and organizing academic events. In this university, Turkish

students learning Arabic, Russian, and Chinese as their second FLs were invited to participate in this research. Their first FL language was English. For all of the participants, their first FL was English. Their ages ranged between 21 and 31. Since this study was exploratory, there was no pre-determined particular number to achieve the representative sample; but, rather, we just aimed to obtain as many participants as possible. Table 1 below presents information regarding the total number of participants per language (i.e. Russian, Arabic and Chinese) and per data collection tool (i.e. survey and interview).

Data Collection Tool	Chinese learners	Arabic learners	Russian learners	Total number of participants
Survey	25 (6 elementary and 19 intermediate)	17 (10 elementary and 7 intermediate)	16 (9 elementary and 5 intermediate)	53
Interview	12 (3 elementary and 9 intermediate)	6 (5 elementary and 1 intermediate)	12 (10 elementary and 2 intermediate)	30

*Table 1.* Participant Information (L1: Turkish)

As can be seen from table 1, elementary and intermediate level students learning each language were asked to participate in the research with an attempt to highlight the possible influences of learner proficiency on their perception of the role of writing in learning their respective foreign languages. In total, 53 language learners completed the surveys and among these learners, 30 learners volunteered to take part in the interviews. They were all majoring in Translation Studies and they were all native speakers of Turkish.

Moving on to the context of the study, Turkey is an English foreign language context. In almost all cases, English is a required foreign

language. While it is not very common to study a second foreign language in this context, students in this university were required to take a second language other than English regardless of their majors. As very few universities offer second FL courses in less-commonly-languages such as Russian and Chinese, studying these languages became a preference criteria for most students choosing to pursue their majors in the university.

### 3.2 Data Collection Tools

The present study adopts mixed research design to investigate language learners' perceptions of the role of writing in learning Arabic, Chinese, and Russian. Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest six types of basic mixed research designs: (1) *Convergent parallel design*, which includes simultaneous quantitative and qualitative data collection, merging the results for comparison and interpreting the results for conversions and diversions, (2) *explanatory sequential design*, which includes first quantitative data collection and analysis, determining quantitative results to further explore in qualitative data collection and interpreting how qualitative data explains quantitative results, (3) *exploratory sequential design*, which includes qualitative data collection and analysis, which build to quantitative data collection and analysis, (4) the *embedded design*, which occurs when the researcher collects and analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data within a traditional quantitative or qualitative design, (5) the *transformative design*, which includes quantitative data collection and analysis following up qualitative data collection analysis within the transformative design framework, and (6) the *multiphase design*, which combines both sequential and concurrent strands over a period of time that the researcher implements within a program of study addressing an overall program objective. The present study adopted the *explanatory sequential design* with the aim of getting a fuller understanding regarding the role of writing in these languages. In other words, qualitative data (i.e. interviews) in this study was used to explain the results obtained from surveys.

During one academic year, undergraduate students learning these languages were invited to participate in a survey (see Appendix

A) regarding their writing and language learning experiences in their respective foreign languages. There were three versions of the survey (i.e. one version for students learning Chinese, one version for students learning Russian and one version for students learning Arabic). All versions were in English and included the same items except that the questions were asking their perceptions regarding their respective languages. The survey items specifically attempted to probe language learners' perceptions regarding the importance of each skill in their language learning, the difficulty of each skill in their language learning processes, their interests in different skills in their language learning, their motivation to learn each skill in their respective foreign languages, and their perceptions regarding the role of each skill in their language learning in general. Language learners were also asked to provide some explanations regarding their rating. In addition, a follow-up interview was conducted with a subset of participants who volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) to get an in-depth exploration of the students' perceptions of the role of writing in their foreign language learning.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Data collection phase started with the collection and analysis of survey data, which has the priority for addressing the study's questions. This first phase was followed by the subsequent collection and analysis of qualitative data. The second, qualitative phase of the study was designed so that it follows from the results of the first, survey phase. After the initial analysis of the survey responses, interview questions were developed in order to explore the issue more deeply in the interviews. Thus, as was the case with data collection, the data analysis was two-folded: First the survey results were analyzed. As the number of survey participants is relatively-low, only the percentages were calculated and reported.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

Using surveys and interviews as primary data collection tools, this study is primarily interested in FL writers' perceptions of the role

of writing in learning Arabic, Chinese, and Russian. Results indicated that learners underline the importance if the role of the act of writing in the initial stages of the language learning processes. The data analysis also revealed that as language learners become more proficient in their prospective FLs, their writing goals and needs become clearer. Finally, certain writing arts such as calligraphy motivated learners to study their respective foreign languages in general.

#### **4.1 The role of writing in learning Russian, Chinese and Arabic**

For most of the Turkish students who participated in this study in the initial stages of their language learning, the very act of writing became a tool or way of learning for learning these languages. However, in contrast to what we know of ESL writing, which informs us writing as an act of communication, for these learners, writing was, sometimes, the only way to memorize the characters in the initial stages. As language learners became more proficient, they reported that their writing needs became clearer, they stated that they considered writing as a way to foster different skills in their respective languages.

##### **4.1.1 Learners' writing interests**

Results indicated that language learners perceived writing as an important factor in the language learning process in these FLs. One question in the survey, for instance, asked language learners to rate their interests in different skills in Russian. The table 2 below summarizes the results for that survey item.

	<i>definitely not</i>	<i>not so much</i>	<i>unsure</i>	<i>much/ likely yes</i>	<i>absolutely/ definitely yes</i>
I am Interested in reading in Russian	0%	0%	10%	8%	82%
I am interested in writing in Russian	0%	0%	2%	5%	93%
I am interested in listening in Russian	10%	10%	22%	10%	48%
I am interested in speaking in Russian	0%	5%	10%	20%	65%
I am interested in learning grammar in Russian	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%

*Table 2.* Survey results regarding learners' writing interest in Russian

As can be seen from the table 2, when rating their interest in writing in Russian, 93% of the participants rated “definitely yes” on a Likert scale. Similarly, 95% of the participants showed interest in learning grammar in Russian. For this question and “definitely yes” answer, the lowest percentage received from Russian language learners was on their interest in listening skill in Russian.

In one of the interviews, an elementary-level Russian language learner explained this interest in writing in Russian as a result of difference between the alphabet in Russian and the alphabet in Turkish. He explained this issue in the following way: “Writing is so important for learning Russian. Since the alphabet is different, if you don’t constantly write, you can’t really know or learn the alphabet and language. Just reading is not enough” (Russian language learner 5, Elementary). A Russian learner at the intermediate level, however, talked about the connections between writing and other skills. She pointed out the importance of writing in Russian for the development of other skills in the following way: “As much as we write different pieces in Russian, we are going to have opinions about different things in Russian so in the future we will be able to talk about those things more easily. Because it is like we have already written them, so we will be able to talk about them easier” (Russian language learner 3, Intermediate).

On the other hand, although essentially, the English alphabet and the Chinese characters share some common features, the way these two writing systems affect reading is quite different. Since Tzeng et al. (1979), various psycholinguistic experiments have been carried out by researchers in both linguistics and psychology. The current state of the research seems to suggest that reading Chinese characters involves the right hemisphere of the brain more than alphabetical reading, although both types of readings involve the left hemisphere.

#### 4.1.2 Learners' motivation to write

Writing was perceived as an important contributor for their language learning in general. The survey also asked the participants to rate their motivation to learn different skills in their respective languages. Table 3 below summarizes the results for that survey item.

	<i>definitely not</i>	<i>not so much</i>	<i>unsure</i>	<i>much/ likely yes</i>	<i>absolutely/ definitely yes</i>
I am more motivated to learn the language when I read Chinese	0%	18%	8%	22%	52%
I am more motivated to learn the language when I write Chinese	0%	0%	5%	10%	85%
I am more motivated to learn the language when I listen to Chinese.	5%	5%	30%	15%	45%
I am more motivated to learn the language when I speak Chinese	10%	5%	5%	25%	55%
I am more motivated to learn the language when I learn grammar in Chinese	8%	10%	60%	10%	12%

*Table 3.* Survey results regarding learners' motivation to write in Chinese

As can be seen from Table 3, 85% of the participants rated “definitely yes” when asked if they were more motivated to learn the language when they wrote Chinese. One surprising finding was the 60% of the learners rated “unsure” about their motivation to learn the language when they learn grammar in Chinese. This is a finding

that contrasted with the high percentage of motivation to learn grammar reported in findings in the literature on English grammar.

In the interviews, some of the participants actually commented on their perceived motivation to write in their respective languages. Most of them the participants pointed out that writing served as a tool for memorization of characters, letters, and sometimes, words and sentences. Thus, memorization, in turn, acted as a part of learners' motivation to write in their respective FLs. For instance, one elementary Chinese language learner explained the process of his Chinese language learning in the following way: "The most difficult part of learning Chinese is definitely writing and this is because of the characters. You need to memorize the characters in order to write in Chinese but for speaking you do not need to memorize them" (Chinese language learner 6, Elementary). Similarly, one elementary-level language learner commented on the role of writing as a tool to study. She explained her Chinese language learning strategies as follows: "I usually study by writing. When I study Chinese, I study everything by writing. Even when I read something, in order to be better at recognizing the characters, I write the characters" (Chinese language learner 2, Elementary). One intermediate-level language learner, however, commented on the grammar in Chinese which might help to explain the relatively-low percentage of surveys on students' motivation to learn Chinese grammar. He explained his perception of Chinese grammar in the following way: "For me the most difficult part of learning Chinese is the understanding because Chinese is very simple when it comes to grammar so they basically speak by putting words next to each other. So there is almost no grammar, no participles, there is almost no suffix, anything." (Chinese language learner 4, Intermediate)

#### **4.1.3. Learners' perceptions about the importance of different skills**

While language learners perceived that they were more motivated to write in Chinese, they did not consider the role of grammar as an important contributor in their overall language learning process. Participants were also asked to rate the importance of each skill for

themselves. Table 4 below summarizes the results from Arabic survey for that item:

	<i>definitely not</i>	<i>not so much</i>	<i>unsure</i>	<i>pretty much/likely yes</i>	<i>absolutely/definitely yes</i>
Reading in Arabic is important for me	0%	5%	5%	25%	65%
Writing in Arabic is important for me	0%	0%	10%	12%	78%
Listening in Arabic is important for me	2%	58%	18%	22%	0%
Speaking in Arabic is important for me	10%	15%	55%	18%	2%
Learning grammar in Arabic is important for me	0%	0%	5%	10%	85%

*Table 4.* Survey results regarding the learners' perceptions of the importance of skills in Arabic

As can be seen from the table 4, 78% of the participants rated the importance of writing in Arabic as “definitely yes,” but this was not the case for listening (0%) and speaking (2%) skills. Not surprisingly, 85% of the participants said “absolutely yes” when indicating the importance of learning grammar in Arabic.

When interviewed, one Arabic learner at elementary level indicated the importance of writing Arabic in virtual communication. He explained this issue in the following way: “Writing in Arabic is important for me because I want to be able to write Arabic in order to communicate with people from the Middle East via internet” (Arabic language learner 7, Elementary). In addition, like most Chinese learners who participated in the present study, letter recognition was a concern for Arabic learners. For instance, one elementary student pointed out that issue as follows: “Writing in Arabic is important because in order to read Arabic, you need to know how it is written to begin with. In order to recognize the letters and words, a person needs to be able to write it first” (Arabic language learner 4, Elementary). Interestingly, some Arabic learners underlined the similarity between Turkish, their L1, and Arabic and

that served as a motivational factor for writing in Arabic. For instance, one participant underlined the influence of her L1 on her L2 writing experiences in the following way:

I guess it is much easier for Turkish learners to write in Arabic, or even communicate in other skills as well, because we have a lot of Turkish words that have Arabic roots and origins. So when I write, I do not feel like I am swimming in unknown waters so I am more comfortable in the language (Arabic language learner, Elementary).

#### **4.2 Writing to participate in the writing culture of the target language**

Participants in the present study commented on the writing culture of the languages they study and it being a motivational factor for them. For Arabic language learners, the culture of calligraphy motivated them to learn the language in general, and writing in particular, in order to participate in the writing culture. For Russian language learners, letter writing culture was a motivational factor for them. Chinese language learners also commented on the role of the history of characters in Chinese language. For example, in one of the interviews, for instance, one language learner talked about the Russian writing culture and explained the influence of culture in her learning to write process in the following way:

Writing is a very important factor in Russian Culture. Two years after Second World War, they always wrote letters to each other. When we read them, we always think that those pieces are very impressive. These are ordinary people but they are writing as if they are elite people talking to each other. So I think the culture gives importance to writing, I mean embellished good writing not the basic one. So writing is important not only for my language learning but also for my participation in this culture. (Russian language learner 1, Intermediate)

A similar cultural motivational factor was underlined by some of the Arabic learners who participated in this study. Calligraphy, the

art of good writing, made some learners more motivated to learn the language in general and writing in Arabic in particular. One language learner expressed her views on this issue as follows: “I think it is fun to write Arabic especially when you start writing calligraphy. It is the culture that I want to be familiar with when I become advanced so I want to learn that.” (Arabic language learner 2, Intermediate).

For Chinese language learners, even the history of the characters they wrote became a motivational factor. One intermediate-level Chinese language learner explained this issue in the following way:

The history of the characters is very important in Chinese. How did they look like a thousand years ago and how do they look like now? How did they become different from each other? Because some of them were the same but they are now different. Without writing instruction, I would not have learned all these things (Chinese language learner 3, Intermediate)

In sum, it seems that, in contrast to the prevailing perception of English as the key L2 for career advancement, in some cases, the writing culture of the respective non-English FLs may also be an important contributor to learners’ perceptions of their advancement and participation in the respective FL cultures.

#### **4.3. Tensions over learners’ and teachers’ expectations of writing and genre expectations**

It seems that compared to ESL classes, FL writing courses in these languages included less cognitive tasks and almost no genre-based instruction, which created tensions over learners’ and teachers’ expectations of writing. Unlike most ESL learners who are required to take the English classes, learners in these classes chose these languages with specific goals in mind. So they desired for writing for a variety of purposes in their respective FLs. For example, interview results indicated some tensions over language learners’ and teachers’ expectations regarding the role of writing in Russian, Chinese, and Arabic classes. In these classes, instructors used writing exercises as a

way to promote learning, but these writing exercises included short pieces, including paragraphs about these countries and short paragraphs about themselves. Some participants commented that these writing activities caused some tensions over students' and teachers' expectations of writing in these classes because some learners considered these topics and activities simple. One intermediate Chinese language learner, for instance, explained this issue in the following way:

We write essays for sure but the topics include things like "Write about your cats" or "Write about your hobbies or favorite movie" or "What did you do for your holiday". In English, I would imagine, for a 20-year-old student, they would require more complex stuff, some philosophical stuff, something about politics, or something more complicated. But, again, then the teachers have the higher level of students there in English classes. (Chinese language learner 2, Intermediate)

A similar issue was also a concern for Russian language learners. One intermediate-level Russian language learner indicated that she had clear goals for writing in Russian, but she did not have many opportunities to practice those aspects in Russian classes. She explained her concerns in the following way: "I want to write more ...I am interested in having a career in trade and I would like to be able to write trade-related pieces like agreements in Russian. For that, you need to develop your technical vocabulary and also your writing abilities...But we never get to those kinds of writings" (Russian language learner 9, Intermediate)

Genre, as "abstract, socially recognized ways of using language" (Hyland, 2007, p. 149), is often defined as "a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written" (Swales, 1990, p. 33). As for the genre expectations, it seems that, as learners became more proficient, their genre expectations became much clearer. One intermediate-level Arabic language learner, for instance, pointed out this issue in the following way: "Maybe I can work in an Arabic-speaking country as a translator. I would be interested in writing

children's stories in Arabic. Especially there are some children's stories in Turkish that are very famous. I am interested in retelling them in Arabic one day" (Arabic language learner 3, Intermediate). Similarly, an intermediate-level Chinese language learner underlined this issue as follows:

For my specific goals, I think writing a CV is fundamental. If you want a job in China, I think you should be able to write a CV. I think I am not that interested in academic writing like thesis or dissertations, and I think that would be impossible for me to write anyways. I am more interested in international trade or finance. For writing, definitely, I should be able to write at least the stuff about international trade and finance and understand it. (Chinese language learner 3, Intermediate)

## 5. Conclusion

The present study investigated language learners' perceptions of foreign language writing and how writing influences their language learning to write in three less-commonly-taught languages. The results indicated that while language learners at lower-levels stated that the very act of writing functions as a tool and, possibly, the only way to memorize the characters, words, and sometimes, sentences, higher level language learners talked about the role of communicative aspects of writing in their language learning processes. The results also indicated the writing culture of the languages studied served as a motivational factor for learning languages in general.

Based on the results of the present study, there are some pedagogical implications for teaching less-commonly-taught languages in non-English dominant settings. Results indicated that there may be some tensions over learners' and instructors' expectations of writing in these classes. In order to ease some of the tensions in this area, the instructors may explore various types of writing assignments to address learners' needs and motivations which may be clearer as they become more proficient. As indicated by Belcher (2006), a learner needs-based approach can ease the possible tensions over students' expectations of writing.

Second, language instructors may also use a genre-based approach for writing in these less-commonly-taught languages (please refer to Yigitoglu & Reichelt, 2012, for an example). As the results of the present study indicated, language learners in less-commonly-taught language classes may have clear writing goals and genre expectations in their minds. In order to ease some of the possible tensions over learners' and instructors' expectations of writing, writing instructors may administer a needs-analysis survey, and, based on the results, include a genre-based approach to the teaching of writing in these classes. More specifically, writing instructors teaching in less-commonly-taught languages may include both pedagogical genres (e.g. essays) and professional genres (e.g. C.V.) in their instruction (for a discussion of professional and pedagogical genres, please see Johns, 2002). Some learners who participated in this study indicated very specific genre expectations and these expectations may be addressed in FL classrooms. These expectations may be addressed in the second language classrooms, because, as Tardy acknowledges, a genre-based instruction adopted with the aim of "helping students to demystify socially situated writing can facilitate the learning of privileged forms of discourse" (Tardy, 2011, pp. 2). For this kind of instruction, writing instructors could also make use of what learners may bring from their L1 genre backgrounds. As Gentil (2011) suggests, components of genre knowledge can transfer cross linguistically. Thus, writing instructors in FL classes may make use of this aspect of genre knowledge in their teaching practices in less-commonly-taught language classrooms.

Some language learners in this study indicated that the writing culture of their respective FLs played an important role in their overall language learning processes. Calligraphy in Arabic, character writing in Chinese, and letter writing culture in Russian motivated the language learners to learn the language in general. The role of writing in language learning processes may differ due to an interplay of individual, linguistic, cultural, contextual, and sometimes institutional reasons. Language learners in different FL classrooms around the world learn to express themselves in writing (the learning-to-write dimension) and they engage in the written output in order to develop their competencies in an L2 (the writing-to-learn dimension)

(Manchón, 2011). In some cases, however, they may see more value in and the need for participating in the writing culture of their respective FLs, as was the case in the present study. Thus, in addition to learning-to-write and writing-to-learn language approaches to writing, teachers may also consider integrating writing-to-participate in the writing culture approach to the teaching of writing in less-commonly-taught languages.

It should be pointed out that the findings reported here are constrained in that they focused on the perceptions of language learners in one institution over a single semester. These perceptions may change as the time passes and a more longitudinal ethnographic approach may shed light on the change in learners' conceptions of and motivation about writing throughout their foreign language learning processes. Future ethnographic research should also take a more longitudinal approach in investigating writing in other non-English FLs in curricular contexts. In order to achieve a more comprehensive account of the role of writing in learning these languages, future researchers can also compare students' and teachers' perceptions of the role of writing and highlight the (mis)matches between teachers' and students' perceptions of foreign language writing.

Finally, it is hoped that the present article has provided readers with insight into the language learners' perceptions of the role of writing in their overall language learning processes, which may be quite different compared to other FL settings. The contributions in the present study are preliminary rather than substantial, given the small scale of the work and its limited data set (surveys and interviews). In addition, as is the case with any study such as the present one, it is hard to generalize these findings to other FL writing programs around the world in general, or those in Turkey in particular, because of the contextual differences in different settings.

Despite these limitations and differences, however, it is hoped that this paper will provide fodder for reflection and directions for future research about students' perceptions and motivations regarding FL writing, as well as the role that writing and writing

instruction might play in the broader L2 curriculum – especially in other non-English L2s, including but not limited to less-commonly taught languages. As Ortega underlines, future research should investigate “a wide range of school, university, workplace and virtual settings across diverse geographical and institutional contexts” (2009, pp. 251). The important, yet neglected, body of work on teaching FL writing in many languages and in various contexts around the world may help develop an awareness and a fuller appreciation for a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of L2 writing scholarship.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Sample Survey*

#### *Student survey questions*

Dear Student,

You are asked to participate in a research on Russian/Chinese/Arabic language learning. For this research you will be asked to complete the following survey and have a short interview afterwards.

Please rate the following aspects of the Chinese language according to how important they are for you. Please tick one of the boxes next to each statement.

	definitely not	not so much	Unsure	pretty much/ likely yes	absolutely/ definitely yes
Reading in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is important for me					
Writing in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is important for me					
Listening in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is important for me					
Speaking in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is important for me					
Learning grammar in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is important for me					

Below, please write several sentences explaining your ranking.

	definitely not	not so much	Unsure	pretty much/ likely yes	absolutely/ definitely yes
Reading in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is difficult for me					
Writing in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is difficult for me					
Listening in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is difficult for me					
Speaking in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is difficult for me					
Learning grammar in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is difficult for me					

Below, please write several sentences explaining your ranking.

	definitely not	not so much	Unsure	pretty much/ likely yes	absolutely/ definitely yes
I am interested in reading in Russian/Chinese/Arabic					
I am interested in writing in Russian/Chinese/Arabic					
I am interested in listening in Russian/Chinese/Arabic					
I am interested in speaking in Russian/Chinese/Arabic					
I am interested in learning grammar in Russian/Chinese/Arabic					

Below, please write several sentences explaining your ranking.

	definitely not	not so much	unsure	pretty much/ likely yes	absolutely/ definitely yes
I am more motivated to learn the language when I read Russian/Chinese/Arabic					
I am more motivated to learn the language when I write					

Russian/Chinese/Arabic					
I am more motivated to learn the language when I listen to Russian/Chinese/Arabic					
I am more motivated to learn the language when I speak Russian/Chinese/Arabic					
I am more motivated to learn the language when I learn grammar in Russian/Chinese/Arabic					

Below, please write several sentences explaining your ranking.

	definitely not	not so much	Unsure	pretty much/ likely yes	absolutely/ definitely yes
If I read Russian/Chinese/Arabic more, I will be better at the language in general					
If I write Russian/Chinese/Arabic more, I will be better at the language					

in general					
If I listen to Russian/Chinese/Arabic more, I will be better at the language in general					
If I speak Russian/Chinese/Arabic more, I will be better at the language in general					
If I learn Russian/Chinese/Arabic grammar rules more, I will be better at the language in general					

Below, please write several sentences explaining your ranking.

***Appendix B: Sample Interview Guide***

1. Can you tell me about yourself? What is your major? Why did you want to study Russian/Chinese/Arabic? How long have you been studying Russian/Chinese/Arabic?
2. What is the most difficult part of learning Russian/Chinese/Arabic?
3. What are some of the main challenges in learning to write in Russian/Chinese/Arabic?
4. Do you think writing in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is harder/easier than speaking or listening in Russian/Chinese/Arabic?
5. What kinds of writing tasks (e.g. character writing, paragraph, etc.) do you have for your Russian/Chinese/Arabic classes?
6. Do you practice writing in Russian/Chinese/Arabic when you study at home?

7. Do you think writing helps you learn vocabulary or grammar faster/easier?
8. What is the hardest part about writing in Russian/Chinese/Arabic?
9. What is the easiest part about writing in Russian/Chinese/Arabic?
10. How long does it take you to write a paragraph or two in Russian/Chinese/Arabic? Do you find yourself fast or slow for this progress?
11. What are some of the strategies that you have for learning in Russian/Chinese/Arabic?
12. What do you write in Russian/Chinese/Arabic? How important do you think it is for you to be able to write different pieces in Russian/Chinese/Arabic for your future goals?
13. When you complete writing in Russian/Chinese/Arabic, do you think about your writing experiences in Turkish or English? How different are they (except that they are orthographically different)?
14. Do you think writing in Russian/Chinese/Arabic is an important factor in your language learning? In other words, if you had had no writing instruction, would you still be able to learn the language?
15. (For intermediate students) Compared with your first year of language learning, do you think you can write easier in Russian/Chinese/Arabic? How does this influence your overall interest in Russian/Chinese/Arabic?
16. (For intermediate students) Do you think writing composing in Turkish is different than writing in Russian/Chinese/ Arabic when you write in this language? Do you ever think about your writing experiences in Turkish or English (your second language)?