

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN WRITING DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT: *In developing writing skills culture plays a crucial role. As a writer his works will definitely be impacted by the culture he is surrounded by and, later the writer is likely to impact the culture of the community with his works. In different geographical locations writing is taught in different ways. The presence of cultural influence is obvious, especially in L2 writing classroom. However, western rules of academic writing have become a “right way of writing” for a long time. Even though highly popular western process pedagogy in writing classes have been supported by many language teachers so far, some scientists question the benefits of this methodology applied in nonnative ESL/EFL classrooms. On the journey of teaching writing to nonnative learners the knowledge of Contrastive Rhetoric and skillful delivery of cultural awareness to learners plays a huge role in the successful learning process. To understand the differences in cultures, some scientists offer graphic representations of cultural thought patterns of various languages.*

Keywords: *culture, teaching writing, process-oriented classroom, Contrastive Rhetoric, inductive, deductive, intercultural awareness, applied linguistics.*

АННОТАЦИЯ: *В развитии навыков письма культура играет решающую роль. Как писатель, на его произведения определенно будет влиять культура, которой он окружен, а позже писатель, вероятно, повлияет на культуру сообщества своими произведениями. В разных географических точках письмо учат по-разному. Наличие культурного влияния очевидно, особенно на уроках*

письма иностранного языка. Однако западные правила академического письма уже давно стали «правильным способом письма». Несмотря на то, что очень популярная западная процессуальная педагогика на уроках письма до сих пор поддерживается многими учителями языка, некоторые ученые ставят под сомнение преимущества этой методологии, применяемой в классах ESL (английский как второй язык)/EFL (английский как иностранный язык) для не носителей языка. На пути обучения письму учащихся, не являющихся носителями языка, знание контрастной риторики и умелое информирование учащихся о культуре играют огромную роль в успешном процессе обучения. Чтобы понять различия культур, некоторые ученые предлагают графические изображения культурных моделей мышления различных языков.

Ключевые слова: *культура, обучение письму, процессно-ориентированный класс, контрастивная риторика, индуктивный, дедуктивный, межкультурная осведомленность, прикладная лингвистика.*

INTRODUCTION

Language is shaped by the culture a human being is embedded in. Namely, daily chores and interactions we have, our attitudes to each other, beliefs and values we firmly adhere to, are all is a significant embryo of our language [1,15]. Since the two are tightly bound, they influence each other at all levels, but first culture influences the way one conveys his thoughts, and later with his creations he can influence or shape the culture in the society.

According to Vygotskian sociocultural psychology and Harry Stack Sullivan's pragmatist interpersonal psychiatry, people are dependent on each other and for their interpersonal purposes and their growth as individuals occurs solely within socio-cultural environment they're surrounded by at the time. Both aforementioned scientists concur with the idea that from ancient times writing has been developed for human interaction, expression of thoughts, views and feelings. Furthermore, they believed writing to be a power that gives an individual to gain popularity by creating a public self or an eternity, passing down a cultural heritage of a certain place and time through the writing piece they produced [2, 101].

Steven Graham believes culture is of huge impact in the development of writing skills in various communities. To study more of cultural impacts in writing communities, as he cites Li, it suffices to note how different the attitudes of teaching writing in two different countries: China and the USA. According to the writer, in Chinese culture, writing is considered as a tool to shape or educate a learner's mind,

while American teachers see writing as a device for self-expression, self-discovery [3, 263].

Owing much to globalization, now a modern learner is in favor of applying any technique, tool, method that hails from any culture or a geographical location, as almost everything is accessible, owing much to the internet. The most important thing is to find which one works best with a particular learner and creates the proper settings that inspires to practice, learn and leads to growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since writing is a literacy skill, we could not mention enough Dwight Atkinsons' views about the ideological¹[9, 12] impact different cultures have on each other's literacy skills. The concept "Literacy as an ideological arena" has been widely supported by the view that reading and writing skills do not occur out of context, but rather within the society, individuality, a certain cultural setting for the last twenty years. According to the theorists, Gee and Foucault we might fail to consider writing and reading to be the main venue of literacy, given that, prior to the act of reading and writing, there are a series of, closely linked, in various fashions, being, doing and knowing, not less important social activities to take place which lead to the act of reading and writing in the first place. Ideologically, Gee, Belcher and Pennycook hold the opinion that, the essence of literacy comes to light especially when doing a writing research and practice in a second/foreign language as it becomes apparent that what is being taught and studied is, in many cases, "powerful literacy" as a particular, restricted social practice [4, 6].

"Composition as a cultural activity" as aforementioned above has become a restricted and powerful use of literacy that has been strongly affected by the "western" social institutions, which dictated the rules of the "game" for a very long period of time to the rest of the world. Then, how to interpret the "voice" of the writer, "critical thinking" skills one has, "originality" of his work or ideas, "plagiarism" out of the cultural settings which have strongly influenced the person since his birthday. With the glance of a teacher, it is sometimes impossible to adjust the educational settings from teacher-centered, knowledge-oriented, and accuracy-focused mode to the popular "western literacy skills" mode, whereby classrooms are suggested to be student-centered, process-oriented, and fluency-focused to gain effective teaching and learning process [4, 6]. It is because the cultural context of the educational backgrounds,

¹Ideology is a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view...ideology is a contested concept. Its reference and relevance cut across disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, political science, history and cultural studies...language and ideology are closely connected. Among the many interpretations of the concept of ideology, there is one common thread that unfailingly runs through all of them: it ties to power and domination."

familiar to all teachers and learners, serves as a guide in the first place; and in an attempt of penetrating the new policy, the guidelines become a barrier. In other words, clash of cultures occurs and the writer-learner feels confusion, as his prior knowledge of social interaction norms are questioned.

By mid-1990s Delpit and Ingilleri had been experimenting and analyzing the results of then-popular process. The scientists regarded such practice to be troublesome, as for learners who have immigrated from other parts of the globe, the process-oriented classrooms do not match with the way they socialize in the atmosphere created at home or in their previous classrooms, and that they are accustomed to more indirect, inductive approach in communication culturally. “Who benefits in the process-oriented classrooms?” – the question arose then [4, 7-8].

METHODS

Dwight Atkinson claims in his *process-oriented writing classes*, his learners did not have a choice of essay topics according to a specific curriculum, and that they had to produce writing about things beyond their personal views or interests which would encourage self-discovery as the main aim of the writing task and, in turn, would contradict the policy of the *process pedagogy*. Hence, he would assign tasks that would require global issues, social matters and so forth [4, 10].

The writer believes for an effective writing teaching as a university level *process writing* is of paramount importance, and that without classroom activities such as pre-writing, drafting, feedback, and revising, the class would be a failure [4, 11].

Johns in his work approves process pedagogy, especially highlighting the cognitive impact of the approach in ESL learning environment. It is common for teachers to encourage students to be more inventive through pre-writing warm-ups, and then require drafts of the task, which is followed by paper revision within a group where they mostly focus on major issues such as the content; finally ask them to submit the final work after fixing, editing and correcting everything at the sentence level [5, 4].

DISCUSSION

In the classroom, ESL teachers while teaching academic writing to their students often times come across some dilemmas at the discourse level. For instance, in organizing a paragraph or choosing the right place for a thesis statement. When checking their students’ work, they notice nonnative discourse organization and realize that it is the adverse effect of students’ L1 and culture on L2 writing. Such teachers are usually convinced of the views suggested by the Contrastive Rhetoric¹ [6, 493]

¹“Contrastive Rhetoric examines differences and similarities in writing across cultures. Although mainly concerned with student essay writing in its first 30 years, the area of study today contributes

research, which offers cross-cultural analysis of written texts and their organization, as well as suggestions for teaching L2 writing. It also helps researchers and teachers to understand better complexities in cross-cultural writing as well as how inquiry approaches demanded historical changes in academic discourse, leaving its track on linguistic and cultural atmosphere [7, 265]. It conjoins with such spheres as intercultural communication, rhetoric and composition, applied linguistics, second language writing, text linguistics, and genre analysis, as mentioned by Ulla Connor [8, 18].

Initially it was Robert Kaplan who offered the suggestion to teachers that when delivering classes of academic writing to nonnative students, teachers ought to take into consideration learners' cultural background and differences in their intercultural awareness which can influence their writing performance in L1 and L2.

Kumaravadivelu, the prominent scholar in applied linguistics has contributed to a great deal to the written communication by demonstrating the role of culture in language learning and learner agency [9, 1-276].

Robert Kaplan, based on his observations of essays written by native and nonnative learners came to a conclusion that writers' display features differed, and in his work, he distinguished two main assumptions of contrastive rhetoric:

- 1) Every culture/language shapes a unique cultural thought pattern in a person and in every culture, there are unique rhetorical conventions/arrangements;
- 2) When a nonnative learner practices writing, his L1 rhetorical conventions mix or interrupt ESL writing.

In his work he also gives different graphic representations of cultural thought patterns, whereby English is illustrated as a linear line, Oriental languages as a centrifugal circle, Semitic languages as parallelism, Romance languages as digression, Russian as a dotted line [10, 15].

Ulla Connor, the leading scholar of contrastive rhetoric, summaries the aforementioned research by giving graphic representations to various other languages:

Arabic is seen as a parallel construction with coordinate clauses, which was impacted by classical texts such as the Old Testament and Qur'an; German is seen as digressive and is concentrated more on content than form; Finnish as inductive and indirect, Spanish as elaborated and flowery with longer sentences and 'loose

to knowledge about preferred patterns of writing in many English for specific purposes situations...Contrastive Rhetoric examines differences and similarities in ESL and EFL writing across languages and cultures as well as across such different contexts as education and commerce. Hence, it considers texts not merely as static products, but as functional parts of dynamic cultural contexts..."

coordination' as distinguished by Connor and, Czech (and other Slavic languages such as Russian, Polish and Ukrainian, as classified by Petric, as less linear than English and with a delayed statement of purpose [7, 266].

Chinese, Korean and Japanese are usually grouped as similar and regarded as inductive and indirect, illustrated by a four-unit organization

called qi-cheng-zhuan-he in Chinese, ki-sung-chong-kyul in Korean or ki-shϕ-ten-ketsu in Japanese, [11, 153], which found its origin in Chinese classical poetry.

What is inductive organization in the text? Hinds in his work used a term that depicts inductive organization and it is called delayed introduction of purpose, which is common in Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Thai whereas in English a thesis statement is placed at the very beginning and it is called a deductive structure. Also, Hinds differentiates another category that sets apart with reader responsibilities and writer responsibilities. Hinds thinks, in different languages the writer may or may not be responsible for the logical link between sentences or paragraphs. That is to say, depending on a language it is reader's or writer's responsibility to make the written speech clear to understand. For instance, in Japanese there are not enough explicit rhetorical devices and it is on the readers' part to turn on logic and make sense out of the text given and thus, Japanese is a reader-responsible language, while English is a writer-responsible one, whereby the writer has to provide logical link between paragraphs, arguments for readers to be more comprehensive and clear [7, 266-267].

On the whole, contrastive rhetoric studies have determined the features of written discourse of English, in particular standard American written English as linear, deductive, logical and writer-responsible. These very characteristics of written English are presented in five-paragraph theme at school writing classes, and includes:

1. Introduction (what are you going to say?)
2. Body 1 (what is it? Say it)
3. Body 2 (what is it? Say it)
4. Body 3 (what is it? Say it)
5. Conclusion (what have you said?) [7, 267]

To make the writing classes more effective, Robert Kaplan states, contrastive rhetoric offers explicit teaching of conventional rhetoric structure in English writing classrooms by providing different ways of learning such as rearranging scrambled parts of the text, using outlines for writing, shaping an outline, using models for imitation, identifying structures and parts of text structures. Also, teaching students' cultural aspects of languages is vital [7, 268].

CONCLUSION

Once Gee stated: “The English teacher can cooperate in her own marginalization by seeing herself as a “language teacher” [also, as a teacher of writing skills, as a guide of critical thinking], with no connection to . . . social and political issues. Or she can . . . accept her role as one who socializes students into a world view that, given its power, must be viewed critically, comparatively, and with a constant sense of the possibilities for change. Like it or not, the English teacher stands at the very heart of the most crucial educational, cultural, and political issues of our time” [12, 68].

A lot depends on teacher’s pedagogical competence when dealing with cultural differences in the ESL/EFL classroom. Every teacher has to be attentive to each learner’s cultural thought patterns and it is on the teacher’s part on how to present academic writing skills in writing classes without being disrespectful to their cultural backgrounds, their originality of thoughts and personal voice in their works.

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