

WRITING THEORY AND PRACTICE

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I Introduction

In this paper, I will review sixteen articles on writing and consider the theories and their applicability in my own classroom. It covers a wide range of topics : process approach, contrastive rhetoric, grammar correction, teacher feedback and evaluation. Writing methodology changed its focus over the years: focus on form, focus on the writer, focus on content and focus on the reader. Writing requires diligence and practice. It cannot be acquired overnight. However, there are many interesting, interactive and creative ways to enhance writing skill.

A teacher's theory and practice in a classroom should match and support each other. However, I used to spend long hours following the routine based on the intuition that what I was doing was beneficial to the students. It was a practice without any underlining theories.

Today many writing textbooks and instructional methodologies are available. It is almost impossible to choose one of them that fits all the students in a classroom. One solution is to try out as many varieties of activities as possible to match the students' needs. I believe that teachers should be encouraged to try new and different ideas rather than following the routine every day.

II Analysis of Tony Silva's article

Tony Silva (1990) summarizes the historical shifts in writing theories, namely, controlled composition, current-traditional rhetoric, the process approach and English for academic purposes in his article. He criticizes the cycle of writing approaches as "merry-go-round". There are four elements to be considered in second language writing instructions : writer, reader, text and context. These

elements interact with each other and should not be considered separately. He encourages the establishment of appropriate theory and approach in writing instructions.

Although Silva's summary of historical development in EFL composition is clear, his call to construct a single reasonable writing theory seems idealistic and unrealistic. He says,

An appropriate and adequate theory of L2 writing, in my view, is one that, at a minimum, regards writing as an interactive activity; is reasonably comprehensive and internally consistent; reflects an understanding of historical developments in the field; is informed by current work in relevant disciplines; and is sensitive to the cultural, linguistic, and experiential differences of individuals and societies.

(Silva, 1990, p. 19).

Is there such a theory? Every genre, culture and society requires different approaches and methods according to the students' needs. Regarding language teaching, there is no "correct" theory that scholars agree upon. Rather, the situation is chaotic with multiple theories and methods tried out and studied each day. Teachers utilize plenty of classroom practices based on different theories of language learning -- some grammar-translation, some audiolingual method and some total physical response, to name a few.

There cannot be a single theory to teach writing. Our aim is not to force cultural and linguistic conformity. Language teachers need to value diversity and adjust their instructions to their students.

III Comments on Ann Raimés' Article

In this article, Ann Raimés (1991) first reviews some writing approaches that emerged during 1966 to 1991. There are four different approaches to writing instruction: focus on form, focus on the writer, focus on content and focus on the reader. Secondly, she raises five controversial issues and problems that should be solved. Researchers have not agreed on the topics for writing, "real" writing, the nature of academic discourse community, contrastive rhetoric and responding to writing. Despite this discord among the teachers and scholars, Raimés sees five new traditions in writing instructions emerging. She supports

the diversity of approaches and recognition of formerly neglected areas.

Raimes' article is clearly organized and addresses to important matters that were neglected by other researchers, although the fairy-tale metaphor seems unsuitable to an academic paper. At the end of the article, she proposes five emerging traditions or five areas for writing teachers and scholars to investigate. Five emerging traditions, according to Raimes are "... recognition of the complexity of composing, of student diversity, of learners' processes, of the politics of pedagogy, and of the value of practice as well as theory" (Raimes, 1991, p.421). She is unmistakable in stressing the need to balance all the four elements involved in writing : form, the writer, content and the reader. Writing is a complex phenomenon and none of these factors should be excluded from the argument.

Other important issues that Raimes raises in her emerging traditions are recognition of student diversity and politics of pedagogy. In the past, EFL students were defined in loose and generalized terms. However, it is necessary to focus on the student body, such as "undergraduate or graduate? freshman or junior? international student [returning to country of origin] or immigrant / refugee ? with writing expertise in L1 or not ? with what level of language proficiency?" (Raimes, 1991, p.420). The purpose of the pedagogy changes the content of class syllabus. And in turn, what the teachers teach impose a political view on the students who are culturally diverse. Education establishes political conformity along its course.

Raimes' paper illuminates the important problems we overlooked and suggests the instructors to meet the EFL students' needs.

IV Comments on Robert Kaplan's Article

Robert Kaplan (1966) states that teaching writing to native English speakers and ESL students are essentially different because of cultural and rhetorical distinctions. English writers employ inductive and deductive reasoning, however, other cultures require diverse logic in composition. Through his analysis of student compositions, Old Testament and an English text on history, Kaplan graphically shows rhetorical systems in English, Semitic, Oriental, Romance and Russian languages. He stresses the need to teach contrastive

rhetoric to ESL students.

Kaplan's suggestion seems fascinating for many teachers as well as researchers, although his argument poses many problems. His article is not linear, whereas he stipulates the English logic to be.

What is particularly problematic is Kaplan's flawed methodology. He does not specify the student participants in the study – their age, types of school or institution, their L1 proficiency and their purpose for learning ESL composition. Moreover, the readers are not informed of the genre of the student writings, whether they are academic or personal and whether the students are assigned the topics by the teacher or not.

Kaplan uses the term, *oriental*, which seems to cover too broad area linguistically. He says, "Oriental here is intended to mean specifically Chinese and Korean but not Japanese" (Kaplan, 1966, p.10). However, he omits the reasons why Japanese is excluded from the study. His usage of "oriental" is overgeneralized.

Finally, how does Kaplan analyze the compositions to draw doodles? There is a jump in the argument and his method is not explained.

Kaplan's article seems to set a poor example of a research conducted in the field of writing instructions.

V Comments on the Article by Peter McCagg

In this paper, Peter McCagg (1996) criticizes John Hinds' (1987) article which argues that Japanese is reader-responsible and English is writer-responsible languages. Instead, McCagg indicates that the Japanese have high-context and the English speakers have low-context cultures respectively. He uses the same waribashi article from Tensei Jingo that is used by Hinds and review it line by line. From this analysis McCagg concludes that the second sentence in the waribashi article declares the topic and that Japanese logic is not necessarily circular as Robert Kaplan (1966) claims.

McCagg does justice by the recognition of schemata in all readers. Readers in both Japanese and English possess previous knowledge even before reading a material. Humans process new information using the old data. Thus, being in a relatively homogeneous society, Japanese readers may share plenty of common

knowledge. However, this does not mean that Japanese have more responsible readers. I agree that both English and Japanese readers make effort to comprehend the texts.

Reading is not a passive, receptive act. Reading and writing should be understood as a communicative exercise. McCagg says, "Writers in every language expect their audiences to contribute to the communicative act according to the conventions of the genre and their shared cultural experiences." (McCagg, 1996, p.248) Ultimately, readers are active participants in the communicative process through the written piece.

Recognition of readers as well as writers as active performers in communication is a step toward understanding the complexity of writing systems.

VI Thoughts on Kubota's Article on Contrastive Rhetoric

In this article, Kubota (1997) criticizes the study of Hinds (1983), which concludes that Japanese writings are characterized by *ki-sho-ten-ketsu*. Hinds' description of Japanese written style as inductive and indirect is challenged based on four reasons. Firstly, Kubota points out that culture is dynamic and it is difficult to see Japanese culture in the pure and unique form in the modern society. Secondly, Hinds seems to overgeneralize a specific example of a newspaper opinion column to the entire Japanese discourse style. Third of all, Hinds overlooks the fact that there are many definitions of *ki-sho-ten-ketsu* by Japanese writers. Lastly, Kubota points out the Japanese history of Westernization.

One of the essential arguments in Kubota's article is that overgeneralization should be avoided in research. For instance, there are literature, expository prose, essay and newspaper styles in Japanese writings. "Tensei Jingo" is a newspaper column. The recognition of diverse genres in writing is necessary. Rather than analyzing one style of writing, research should include as many types of written texts in order to determine what is typical of the Japanese rhetoric.

Another significant implication of Kubota's article is that it consults the original Japanese writings on *ki-sho-ten-ketsu*. She discovers the disagreement

among the expert Japanese writers about the definition of *ki-sho-ten-ketsu*. Moreover, some Japanese writers consider that the structure is suitable for certain genres, but not the others.

Kubota's article proposes a balanced view of teaching contrastive rhetoric to ESL students by warning against overgeneralization and introducing Japanese writers' multiple interpretations of *ki-sho-ten-ketsu*.

VII Is Writing the Process of Discovering Meaning ?

---Comparison of Zamel and Reid's Articles---

In this section, Zamel's (1982) article on the process approach and Reid's (1984) article on the radical outliner and the radical brainstormer are contrasted and analyzed together. According to Zamel, writing is a process to discover thoughts and meanings. She compares the composing processes of proficient and less proficient ESL writers and concludes that the former focuses on the composing process and content while the latter is restrained by correctness and form. Reid, on the other hand, states that people have different writing strategies, using extensive outlines or brainstorming with many revisions. Reid herself is a radical outliner and her husband is a brainstormer. Students stand somewhere along the continuum between these two extremes of outliners and brainstormers, according to Reid.

Although process approach is a useful technique to be used in writing classrooms, Zamel's articles poses two main problems. Firstly, she fails to note that some writings are not the discovery of meaning. There is not a single correct way to compose. Reid, as a radical outliner, spends long time planning. Then she revises her writing extensively before and during outlining. After that, drafting is simple. She says, "Once I have completed the outline, the draft is a fairly straightforward affair; I 'construct meaning' but do not usually 'discover meaning'" (Reid, 1984, p.530). Thus, for some writers, writing is not a process to discover meanings. Rather, meanings exist already in the outlines and through the planning process, meaning is constructed.

Secondly, Zamel's definition of skilled and less skilled writers is questionable. She says :

In the process of discovering meaning, these experienced writers

changed whole chunks of discourse, and each of these changes represented a reordering of the whole. Sommers concluded that "it is a sense of writing as discovery – a repeated process of beginning over again, starting out new – that the less experienced students failed to have" (Zamel, 1982, p.198).

However, this is a typical behavior of a radical brainstormer. Zamel's argument excludes outliners to be skilled or experienced writers. In her study, Zamel seems to have only the examples of proficient writers who were brainstormers but not outliners. If Zamel argues that writing process should be valued more, how could she divide skilled and less skilled writers? People should not be labeled as good or bad writers. They are good in some genres of writing, bad in the others. Therefore, rather than labeling writers as skilled and unskilled, experienced and inexperienced, we should label the writing behaviors and writing strategies.

To conclude, Reid is pointing out Zamel's weaknesses in her argument. Reid says that people write using different strategies and that they should not be divided as skilled and less skilled writers according to their strategies. Writing is not necessarily a discovery of meaning for everyone. Teachers need to understand that the students employ various approaches to writing.

VIII Process Approach and Implication for Classroom Instruction :

Analysis of Casanave, MacGowan-Gilhooly and Zamel's Articles

Process approach and evaluation of written products seem irreconcilable. What is the implication of a process approach in actual Japanese college classrooms?

As an alternative method of writing instruction to EFL students, the process approach is appealing to teachers and researchers. Casanave (1988) analyzes the process approach and illuminates six underlying assumptions that are often ignored or neglected. She clarifies the essential issues and states that product and process are inseparable, writing is not always a process of discovering meaning and writers cannot be labeled as skilled and unskilled based on their behaviors.

One way to implement the process-oriented writing exercises in classroom is fluency first approach explained by MacGowan-Gilhooly (1996). She uses whole-

language theory to L2 instruction by assigning intensive reading and writing to the students. At the end of the three courses, the university's required skills assessment writing test's passing rate increased from 35 to 56 percent.

Although MacGowan-Gilhooly reports a successful case study, she avoids detailed data and sample questions in her research. Evaluating the students' writing processes is burden if not impossible. Zamel (1985) studies the actual teachers' responses to university-level ESL students and notices the inconsistencies and mistakes in teachers' understanding. She encourages the teachers to become writing instructors rather than language instructors and to regard all writing as work in progress to be revised and edited.

MacGowan-Gilhooly's article introduces some of the readings used in her ESL classes, which can be applied to Japanese counterpart. Instead of adopting graded readers available today, she exposes the students to authentic literature, autobiographies and non-fictions. The students write responses to the readings, review them in groups and edit them.

Both MacGowan-Gilhooly and Zamel emphasize the importance of meaning and content. All writing should be regarded as drafts to be revised. They seem to disregard the key issue pointed out by Casanave that process and product are interdependent.

Practical college teachers are aware of their responsibilities to give grades to every student sooner or later. Zamel's paper teaches us how to respond to students' writings but not how to evaluate them.

On realistic terms, process approach is not a magic wand that can solve all our problems. As Casanave mentions, "the process approach is not a theory" (Casanave, 1988, p.37). It is a perspective or an instructional technique to be used in classroom. With this understanding in mind, instructors can make the best use of this method where it is appropriate and suitable.

IX Yakudoku and Japanese Teachers :

Do We Teach in the Way We Were Taught ?

At the first glance, Gorsuch's article (1998) on yakudoku EFL instructions reminded me of my high school English and French classes. Gorsuch studies two Japanese male EFL teachers working for a public boys' high school outside

Tokyo. Through classroom observation, teacher interviews and an examination of materials, she analyzes teachers' attitude toward yakudoku and actual classroom practices and found that their beliefs were reflected in their practices. Teachers use this method in order to prepare the students for the university entrance exams. She verifies that yakudoku is a teacher-centered activity to translate English text into Japanese and the students focus on the Japanese translation more than the English text.

At my elementary school English was introduced at the fourth grade. My first English teacher, Ms. Endo only spoke in English from day one. I still remember her shaking hands with me saying, "How do you do?" I always wanted to be like Ms. Endo. I think that her existence determined my career to be an English teacher. If the students see their Japanese English teachers as models of people who actually use English, they can be inspired to achieve this goal by themselves.

Gorsuch cites an interesting aspect of the reasons why teachers believe in yakudoku in Japan :

One survey ... by the Research Group for College English Teaching in Japan (1983) focused on 1,012 college and university EFL teachers. Findings indicated that teachers in these environments tended to subscribe to one of three views of how to approach the learning of English as a foreign language. The first group (48.9% of respondents) felt that English is best learned through "intensive reading, translation, and appreciation of literary works". This group is best labeled the "English and American literature" group. The second group (37%) felt EFL study was best approached through English linguistics, hence the name the "English linguistics" group. The third group, labeled the "TEFL" group (20.8%) subscribed to the belief that EFL study is best approached through methodology current in the TEFL field (Gorsuch, 1998, p. 12).

This distinction illustrates the prevailing yakudoku method in Japanese EFL teachers. According to the survey, 48.9% of the English teachers belong to "English and American literature" group. My high school and university

language teachers all seem to share their background in literature. Naturally, translation becomes their method in L2 instruction based on the way they were taught. My elementary school teacher seemed to be in the "TEFL" group, which only consists of 20.8%. She taught me that yakudoku was not the only way to learn English.

X Ranking, Evaluating and Liking

Peter Elbow (1993) divides teachers' assessment of their students into three categories: ranking, evaluating and liking. He defines ranking as adding the students' performance into holistic score on a single scale. Evaluating is to judge their achievements using different criteria and features. Liking is different from ranking and evaluating and according to Elbow, liking leads to improvement in writing. Elbow concludes that teachers should avoid ranking and create evaluation-free zones so that teachers and students can learn to like their writings. I believe that the students should learn to like English first as a prerequisite of any improvement.

I taught English at a private elementary school in Tokyo for two years. I almost made it my life-long career if only there weren't assessment. I was to give grades to 540 children whom I teach only once or twice a week. There were 45 children in one class and only 45 minutes in one class period. I have only one minute per child every week. At the end of each term, I should give certain numbers of 5s and 4s as the grades in each class. It was a difficult task – I wanted to give everybody 5s and 4s (better grades). I was giving 3s and 3 + s for little reasons and justifications. It was painful.

Elbow's article helped me understand the dilemma I was facing at the elementary school. The English Department set the aim of their English education to familiarize them with English and to have fun through communicative activities. In other words, the purpose of the classes is to help the students like English. I was trying to do liking while in reality all I did was ranking. As a result, the students only studied for their grades.

Elbow's article reminded me of how educational theories should support our practices.

**XI Samurai' s Sword and Writing Teacher' s Red Pen :
Are They the Symbols of Authorities ?**

Grammar correction in L2 writing classes has been continued for centuries, yet no language teacher seemed to deny it before Truscott (1996). Truscott states that grammar correction should be abandoned because researchers in both L1 and L2 prove its ineffectiveness. Moreover, students are in different stages of interlanguage, so it is almost impossible to give each of them adequate corrections from which students can learn and improve future writings. He concludes that grammar correction is harmful, because the students lose motivation and teachers waste their time correcting for no significant reasons.

Ferris (1999) criticizes Truscott (1996) for overgeneralization, logical leap in argument and calls for further research. Ferris' s reasoning seems weak, especially since she failed to refer to the students' interlanguage and Krashen' s natural order hypothesis.

Truscott (1999) answers Ferris (1999) that generalization from different types of students, methods and research design is even preferable. He points out Ferris' s lack of published sources to support the validity of grammar correction. In addition, most of Truscott' s argument is unchallenged, according to the paper.

Truscott' s writing (1996) stirs up controversy among teachers who probably feel deprived of their authority to correct student errors. In addition to the natural order hypothesis and researches that support Truscott, what strikes me the most is about the teachers' intuitions. Now I don' t even know why I was spending hours correcting grammatical mistakes. It was based on my intuition apart from any theoretical background and reasoning. Truscott says :

It is difficult to escape the feeling that grammar correction must work, that it has to help students. In face of these strong intuitions, probably no amount of evidence will convince many teachers, students, or researchers that grammar correction is misguided (Truscott, 1996, p.341).

In Japan, teachers are depicted as creatures walking around correcting everything with their red pens. Sometimes correspondence teachers for junior

high and high school students are referred to as "aka pen sensei" or red pen teachers. It is as if red pens are as indispensable to teachers as swords to samurai. I have heard of a French teacher in Japan who visits French restaurants and corrects spelling on the menu with red pens. The teacher cares but probably nobody else appreciates it. Although Ferris says that students expect to be corrected, being corrected is unpleasant and annoying for other people.

Correction with red pens seems to be the expression of teachers' authorities and power. Some teachers are so obsessed with corrections that they forget what else they can do without their red pens. From this day on, I will give up on my threatening red pen and start using different colors.

XII The Link between Japanese and English Writing Abilities

In this section, I will review Kubota's article (1998) on L1-L2 transfer in writing and consider its applicability in my classroom.

At the college where I teach English Listening Comprehension, I have classes of mixed nationalities. Most of them are Japanese since the school is located in Tokyo. However, there are Korean Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese and Vietnamese students. The most striking fact is that the foreign students are often the ones who receive the highest scores and are the most creative of all. Moreover, these excellent students speak fluent Japanese and their usage of Japanese honorific even surpasses that of their Japanese classmates.

Kubota (1998) investigated 46 Japanese university students writing expository and persuasive essays in L1 and L2. Both Japanese and ESL essays were evaluated on the dimension of organization and coded by the location of main idea and the macro-level rhetorical patterns. No negative transfer of culturally unique rhetorical patterns was detected. Kubota proposed the importance of students' L1 writing ability, L2 proficiency and L2 writing experience affecting the students' writings in L2.

Kubota's paper is significant, since it both compared L1 and L2 texts written by the same students. She emphasizes that within-subject transfer of rhetorical patterns should be examined in order to see the validity of transfer hypothesis.

Another salient issue in her article is the possibility of positive transfer

instead of negative transfer. Kaplan (1966) and Hinds (1983) argue that "native language patterns of rhetorical organization may be negatively transferred to English language compositions" (Hinds, 1983, p. 184). Kubota says that similarities in rhetorical structures across cultures can accomplish positive transfer. I believe that this notion of positive transfer partly explains why some of the foreign students in my class are excellent in both English and Japanese. They possibly have strong L1 linguistic proficiency that positively transfers to their L2 abilities.

Based on the results of the students' essays, Kubota states that L1 writing ability influences L2 writing. Good Japanese writers can employ similar writing strategies in English writing. This finding indicates that the students need solid background in writings in their L1. More and more Japanese parents send their children to English language schools to educate them to become international-minded adults. However, at very young age, children may be better off learning to write correct hiragana, katakana and kanji characters and grammatically correct Japanese sentences. L1 proficiency enables rapid acquisition of L2 in the long run.

Other two factors that influence L2 writing are English proficiency and abundance of writing experience in English. Although Japanese writing ability is beyond college English teacher's reach, I can encourage the students to listen, speak, read and write more in English in my classroom. I believe that Japanese students need more practice reading and writing in English. Traditional junior high and high school English education emphasizes yakudoku or grammar translation. As a result, the students cannot function in English. They are accustomed to always think, analyze and understand in Japanese.

Kubota's article is interesting and illuminating to the English instructors as well as researchers in Japan.

XIII Conclusion

It is essential for a language teacher to study theories and develop teaching practices on that basis. A teacher should be able to describe the theory underlining each activity in class, its purpose and benefit.

Contrastive rhetoric manifests an ethnocentric view of writing instruction.

More attention should be paid to the dynamic nature of culture and writing systems before concluding on the rhetorical differences.

Correcting student papers requires long hours and may not be beneficial to the students. It is almost impossible to correct grammar according to the students' developmental stages. Each student is most likely to be in the different stages of developmental sequences. The time can be spent more wisely on different activities.

Process approach holds a key to more interactive classroom. The students can be aware of their own mistakes, writing strategies and leaning preferences. They can learn from other student's writings and writing processes. It is essential for them to be metacognitively aware of their learning.

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