Assessing Writing 37 (2018) 25–38

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Assessing Writing

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/asw

Writing from sources: Does audience matter?

Yeonsuk Cho*, Ikkyu Choi

Educational Testing Service, Rosedale Road, MS 04-R, Princeton, NJ 08541, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Audience awareness
Construct
English as a second language
Source-based writing
Task specification
Text analysis

ABSTRACT

Contextual factors influence the way we speak and write. An audience is central to the rhetorical context and helps to identify the parameters of a writing task. The purpose of this study was to examine whether and how the specification of an audience influenced the summary writing produced by adult English as a Second Language (ESL) writers in a large-scale writing assessment setting. The performance of 205 test takers who completed two writing tasks was compared with respect to audience awareness measured by three aspects of writing: context statements, content, and source attribution. Both tasks required test takers to summarize source information, but they were contrasted with respect to the specification of audience in our analysis. One task was presented without reference to an audience, whereas the other task explicitly instructed test takers to address a reader who was unfamiliar with the sources they would summarize. Of the three aspects of writing, the effect of audience specifications was observed on source attribution and context statements. This was not the case for content when responses between the two tasks were compared. However, all aspects were shown to vary across writing score levels when compared within the writing condition with audience specification.

1. Introduction

One of the key elements of any rhetorical situation is audience awareness. Empirical evidence has shown that skilled writers distinguish themselves from less skilled writers in their ability to recognize and address the demands of an audience (e.g., Graves, 1975; McNamara, 2013; Ransdell & Levy, 1994; Zainuddin & Moore, 2003). By the same token, the development of audience awareness has garnered much interest among researchers and teachers (e.g., Callison & Lamb, 2004; Carvalho, 2002; Crowhurst & Piche, 1979; Magnifico, 2010). In particular, research has shown that paying attention to the needs of the audience is shown to affect writers' decisions on how and what to present in their writing as manifested in the quality of writing they produce, such as the presence of background information (e.g., Chesky, 1987), content (e.g., Midgette, Haria, & MacArthur, 2008), and source uses (e.g., Campbell, 1990).

While the ability to address rhetorical constraints is widely recognized as part of the construct of writing by many first language (L1) writing researchers (e.g., Camp, 2012) and audience awareness frequently appears as a trait on scoring rubrics for native speakers (e.g., DiPardo, Storms, & Selland, 2011; Dryer, 2013; Oppenheimer et al., 2017), the invocation of audience in writing assessment prompts for second language (L2) writers has not been well studied. In the present study, we addressed this gap by examining the effect of audience specification in a prompt on the quality of summary texts by English as a second language (ESL) writers in a standardized testing context.

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: ycho@ets.org (Y. Cho), ICHOI001@ets.org (I. Choi).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2018.03.004
Received 23 May 2017; Received in revised form 3 March 2018; Accepted 13 March 2018
1075-2935/ © 2018 Published by Elsevier Inc.

2. Audience awareness in writing

Researchers support the view that addressing a specific audience guides writers during the writing process and ultimately influences the final product of writing (e.g., Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Flower & Hayes, 1981). This view is substantiated by empirical evidence including a study by Alamargot, Caprossi, Chesnet, and Ros (2010), in which pause patterns and the quality of final texts were examined in relation to working memory. The study included two groups of graduate students with higher and lower working memory spans. The group with a higher working memory span had longer pauses during the writing. The researchers interpreted the longer pauses as an indication of high-level processing such as planning content and targeting the text toward the audience's needs. This interpretation was corroborated by the fact that the procedural texts by the high-working memory group included more supporting details for readers. Hansen (2000) and Zainuddin and Moore (2003) also revealed through case studies that skilled writers pay attention to the characteristics of the audience in the L2 writing context. The proficient ESL writers interviewed in the two studies demonstrated a keen awareness of audience in determining the content of writing and adapting their texts to the needs of the audience throughout the writing process.

The effect of audience on a final text is also evident in studies focusing on linguistic features of written texts. Midgette, Haria, and MacArthur (2008) observed that writers' considerations concerning their audience influenced the content of persuasive writing by elementary and middle-school students. When prompted to consider audience, students tended to include more opposing ideas in their arguments in persuasive writing than did those who were not explicitly instructed to consider audience. This result was interpreted as evidence that audience awareness led students to consider other perspectives in developing an argument. Furthermore, in the analysis of 7th grade students' writing in Hebrew, Cohen and Riel (1989) found that students were more explicit in expressing ideas and included background information when writing to peer students in different countries, compared to writing to their classroom teachers, as they assumed that the formers did not share background knowledge. Other studies showed a similar result that writers include more background information to establish a clear context for the readers and to close the gap between the writers and readers who are unfamiliar with the topic when they consider audience (e.g., Hansen, 2000; Rijlaarsdam, Couzijin, Janssen, Braaksma, & Kieft, 2006; Wollman-Bonilla, 2001).

Audience awareness is also shown to affect the choice of language (e.g., Chen & Brown, 2012; Li, 2000). Frank (1992) compared the advertisements that fifth graders wrote for two different audiences, third-grade students and adults. The advertisements intended for adults tended to be longer and contained more formal language, but the advertisements for the younger audience contained more colloquial language and a personal tone describing the objects. The author concluded that the differences in the characteristics of the advertisements reflected the students' ability to adapt texts according to the needs of different audiences. Yasua (2011) reported a similar finding from a study of email writing with college-student writers learning English in Japan. She examined the changes in the quality of email requests with respect to lexical diversity and sophistication after receiving a 15-week long genre-based instruction. Results showed significant improvements in language choice and grammatical control after students learned how to address their requests to an intended audience.

These studies demonstrate the positive effects of audience awareness on writing across writers of different ages in both first and second language writing research. They also suggest that the ability to address different audiences is a fundamental component of writing ability and is relevant to writers across contexts, which is congruent with faculty's view of academic writing (Zhu, 2004). Researchers in writing theories embraced various paradigms to stake out the construct of writing, rendering differing explications and representations of writing ability. Nonetheless, in her overview on the construct of writing, Camp (2012) concluded that theories of writing development from differing paradigms intersect at the sociocultural perspective such that the construct of writing is interpreted as a social mediation to create meaning. Accordingly, writing assessments and their evaluation criteria should take into consideration the influence of contextual factors on writing.

3. Audience awareness in writing assessment

Many L1 writing researchers called for a design of writing assessments that better reflects the complex nature of writing as a social activity and consequently has a positive impact on the way students learn and value writing (e.g., Behizadeh & Pang, 2016; Slomp, 2016). The attention to the sociocultural aspect of writing is reflected in the evaluation criteria employed by many college-level writing programs. Analyzing keywords of performance descriptors from 83 rubrics used by college writing programs, Dryer (2013) demonstrated that writers' rhetorical awareness is valued by many university writing programs. This is a positive trend in L1writing assessment.

Yet, the importance of rhetorical context is not well implemented in many large-scale standardized writing assessments. Coker and Lewis (2008) criticized that large-scale writing assessments fail to elicit authentic writing as they lack contextual information, such as a communicative purpose and an authentic audience, which are critical to the construction of meaning. Olinghouse, Zheng, and Morlock (2012) provided the empirical evidence that the lack of contextualization is pervasive in many writing assessments. In the analysis of 222 prompts used for statewide writing assessments in the U.S., they found that half of the prompts did not specify audience and that more than two-thirds of the prompts did not have a clear purpose for real-life communication. In a more recent survey of state writing assessments, Behizadeh and Pang (2016) drew a similar conclusion by saying that "current practices do not strongly align with notions of sociocultural writing that position writing … that vary by context" (p. 37).

Lack of attention paid to audience awareness is more pronounced in L2 writing assessments. Yu (2013) conducted a critical review of the summary writing assessments of the three influential international English proficiency tests. In his evaluation of the large-scale summary writing tasks, Yu stated that "a primary fault in test directions is not to specify why a summarization activity is required, for

دریافت فوری ← متن کامل مقاله

ISIArticles
مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات