

Audience strategies used by EFL college writers

Fei-Wen Cheng

National Chiayi University, Taiwan

This study examines how two EFL college students represented their audience in the writing process and how they adapted their writing to the assigned audience. The results indicated that the more proficient writer was more capable of analyzing and making inferences of the assigned audience than the less proficient writer. Her conceptualizations were also richer and more articulated. Both participants were able to employ a diverse variety of more obvious audience appeals but they were less able to argue from the reader's viewpoint. Also, the school context influenced their audience conceptualization. Pedagogical suggestions were offered.

Most composition theorists and researchers agree that the consideration of audience is critical to effective persuasive writing. Several studies have also concluded that effective writing is audience adapted (Fountaine, 1988; Rafoth, 1985; Roen & Willy, 1988; Rubin & Rafoth, 1986). The audience consideration is particularly important in EFL context because most EFL students do not write in English to fulfill academic requirements but to communicate in English with diverse readers for various purposes. Despite its importance, most composition textbooks simply advocate the need for the writers to consider audience but few treat this issue in great details. Also, few researchers give any attention to how teachers can facilitate this awareness in students writing or what constitutes effective instruction in audience. This lack of audience pedagogy motivated the present study.

Why do researchers make few attempts to develop effective audience pedagogy? One reason is that the concept of "audience" is a slippery term that often indicates various conceptions and values within different rhetorical epistemologies (Porter, 1996; Jackson, 1999). Audience-addressed theorists conceive of the writer's audience as readers who are concrete realities whom the writer must address (Flower & Hayes, 1977; Ewald, 1988; Youga, 1989). These theorists suggest that teachers can use heuristics to promote a writer's thinking on audience through a series of open-ended questions in order for the writer to gain a picture of his intended audience. Critics of audience addressed theory argue that real reader analysis is an insufficient pedagogy because it assumes that the writer's audience is static and it often leads to stereotyped conceptions of target readers (Long, 1980; Park, 1982; Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Jackson, 1999). By contrast, audience-invoked theorists believe that readers are textual constructs the writer creates through which real readers must adopt (Park, 1982; Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Willey, 1990). This invoked-based theory encourages questions that lead the author to determine who he wants his audience to be. Critics argue that such pedagogy ignores the fact that any texts intend to and eventually reach a "real audience" (Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Roth, 1987; Porter, 1992). Nevertheless, recent scholarship has suggested that the distinctions between audience addressed and audience invoked are largely artificial. That is, the writer actually addresses a "real audience" and invokes a fictional audience at various stages of the writing processes (Ede & Lunsford, 1984; Willey, 1990; Porter, 1992). However, little empirical research explore at which stages of the writing process writers tend to invoke audience and at which stages writers tend to address audience, if indeed they do so at all. Thus, we still do not know what is the most effective method for teaching audience?

Another reason for lack of audience pedagogy is that school context creates an artificial rhetorical situation that constrains the teaching of audience and a student's use of audience strategies

(Young, 1981; Crowhurst, 1990; Petraglia, 1995; Jackson, 1999). Although, students are required to write for multiple audiences at school---the self, the teacher, a general audience, a specific reader, or a group of readers, often the real reader of the students' text is usually not the hypothetical audience assigned in the writing task but the teacher, who is not the assigned audience but who must evaluate students' writing for persuasiveness and effectiveness. Thus, students may be confused as to whom their audience really is. More research is needed to investigate how the school context affects a student's representation of audience and his selection and use of audience strategies.

Most importantly, our lack of effective audience pedagogy is because we still lack a clear picture of how L2 (second language) students conceptualize the target reader and how they deal with audience demands throughout the writing process. Previous L1 (first language) studies were contradictory about whether students were able to address or invoke audience throughout the composing process (Fountain, 1988; Roen & Willey, 1988; Kirsch, 1991; Jackson, 1999). There are also mixed findings about whether their lack of audience concern is due to an inability to elicit information through inferences or an inability to use audience information (Fontain, 1988; Black, 1989). These inconclusive results warrant further study, particularly on L2 writers who need to grapple with cultural, rhetorical and linguistic demands simultaneously in order to enhance our understanding of students' audience representation, their difficulties in doing so and their audience accommodation strategies. Without this picture and the understanding of the students' thought process, it is more difficult to develop a pedagogy that will actually meet students' needs. As such, the present study investigated the following questions: 1) How did EFL college students conceptualize their audience in the writing process? 2) How did such conceptualization guide their writing process? 3) How did they adapt their writing to the assigned audience?

Methods

Case study approach was employed to examine audience strategies used by two English major freshmen in Taiwan as they responded to a teacher-prepared argumentative prompt. In the prompts, participants were given a hypothetical rhetorical situation describing the U.S. President has encountered several domestic problems and would like to implement *Feng-Shui* into the White House. To prevent students from misunderstanding *Feng-Shui*, explicit explanation of this term was given in the prompt as follows: *Feng-Shui* is an ancient Chinese art of arranging the physical surroundings to create harmony and good luck. Participants were required to advise the U.S. President whether he should or should not implement Feng-Shui in the White House.

Both participants have received one-semester basic English writing instruction and varied in their writing proficiency. Student A was less proficient than student B. They were asked to think-aloud as they composed their essays and after completion of their draft the researcher conducted discourse-based interview about their choice of their arguments based on their written texts. One week later, they went through the same procedure as they revised their first draft. The researcher transcribed the think-aloud protocols and the interviews into written verbatim.

To examine how students represented their audience during the composing processes, their think-aloud protocols transcripts were analyzed using the audience protocols scheme developed by Berkenkotter (1984). The audience-related activities in the composing process were divided into five coding categories including: analyzing/constructing a hypothetical audience (i.e. considering facts about the audience given in the writing assignment, making complex inferences from the

description of the audience); goal setting and planning for a specific audience (i.e. generating audience-related goals, naming audience-related plans); evaluating content and style with regard to anticipated audience response (i.e. evaluating audience response to content); reviewing, editing, and revising for a specific audience (i.e. making major changes in text already written in deference to audience); miscellaneous audience-related activities (i.e. directly addressing audience in protocol, “you” or indicating lack of familiarity with audience).

The textual analysis for audience strategies in students’ writing was conducted using the audience coding scheme developed by Hays et al. (1988 & 1990). This scheme included five moves. First, naming moves refer to writers’ recognition of an audience existence by direct and indirect reference. Second, context moves refer to strategies writers employ to establish context and gives background information for the reader. Third, strategy moves refer to implementing tactics that recognize readers attributes or seek to convince readers, such as appealing to readers’ self interest or stating readers’ responsibilities and obligations. Fourth, response moves refer to writers’ awareness of readers’ questions, objections, such as stating readers’ concerns or giving reasons for these concerns. Fifth, inappropriate or negative moves involve writer’s references to the audience that would impair the writer-reader relationship, such as blaming readers or giving reasons that were not adequately explained.

To measure writer’s conscious amount of audience adaptations, the discourse-based interviews were scored for levels of strategic adaptations using the audience adaptation measure developed by Black (1989). This measure indicated a progressively greater adaptation of the persuasive appeal to the target audience. A score of 1 to 6 was assigned to reasoning and sensitivity to the perspective of the target reader and the adaptation of the appeal based on the reasons that the students gave for each of their arguments, appeals or adaptations.

Results and Discussion

Writer’s audience representation in the composing process

The following analysis focused on how the participants constructed the target audience and how such audience representation affected their writing process (See Table 1). Audience activities were coded when the participant took into account of the specified reader in the writing assignment.

Table 1: Audience-related activities for students A & B

Analyzing/Constructing a hypothetical audience	A	B
A. Considering facts about the audience given in the assignment (Age, grade level)	1	2
B. Constructing hypothetical audience characteristics		
C. Making simple inferences from the description of the audience, which may or may not be accurate		3
D. Making complex inferences (more than one) from the description of the audience		
E. Identifying audience with self (role-playing)		
F. Identifying audience with self (projecting)		
G. Creating rhetorical context in oral protocol		
Total	1	5
Goal setting and planning for a specific audience		
A. Generating audience-related goals	2	1

B. Naming audience-related plans	3	4
C. Generating sub-goals or refinements of the plan	7	3
D. Consolidating several sub-goals to carry out the plan	1	2
E. “Satisficing” (temporarily eliminating some sub-goals of the plan to carry out others)		
F. Representing oneself to the audience (persona)		
Total	13	10
Evaluating content and style with regard to anticipated audience response		
A. Evaluating audience response to content (may be about text being considered or completed text)	9	6
B. Evaluating audience response to style (persona)		1
Total	9	7
Reviewing, editing and revising for a specified audience		
A. Deciding to systematically review and improve the text, keeping the audience in mind	1	
B. Making major changes in text already written, in deference to audience	3	3
C. Making minor changes in text already written, in deference to audience		3
Total	4	6
Miscellaneous audience-related activities		
A. Directly addressing audience in protocol (“you”)	7	
B. Reminding oneself to keep the audience in mind		
C. Indicating lack of familiarity with audience		1
Total	7	1
In Total	34	29

In the protocols, student A used a total of 34 audience-related activities while writing both drafts. The majority of her audience activities had to do with goal setting and planning for a specific audience (13 out of 34). Other prominent activities were evaluating content and style with regard to anticipated audience response (nine out of 34) and using “you” to directly address audience (seven out of 34).

Throughout the whole composing process, she did not make much effort on analyzing her audience (one out of 34). She constructed the image of the reader as foreigners, who were unfamiliar with Feng-Shui but believe in astrology. At the beginning of the writing process, she set an audience-related goal, “to persuade the president”, which is drawn from on the task requirements as specified in the writing prompt. Next, she started to generate some audience-related plans, such as “first, I have to give him a complete picture of what Feng-Shui is”, or “come up with impressive examples from the president’s perspective.” Then, she plunged into generating ideas and transcribing them into the texts. During the transcribing phase, she kept evaluating whether or not her text would make sense to her own conception of the assigned reader by using questions or commenting her own ideas, such as “Does my logic make sense?” However, these evaluations did not lead to any subsequent actions. This indicated that student A involved less negotiation with her audience. Also,

she made few revisions at the sentence level (four out of 34) and maintained the essential meaning of her first draft.

Student B in her protocols verbalized less concerns about the target reader specified in the writing assignment, a total of 29 audience-related activities while writing both drafts. The majority of her audience activities had to do with goal setting and planning for a specific audience (10 out of 29). Other prominent activities were evaluating content and style with regard to anticipated audience response (seven out of 29) and revising for audience (six out of 29). In contrast to student A, student B made more effort on considering the factual information of the assigned audience and making inferences about the audience. For example, “What motivated him to implement Feng-Shui in the White House was his trip to Hong Kong for three weeks. Being a leader, his behavior is irrational.” Also, she not only evaluated audience response to her texts but also drew on her comments to revise her texts.

Given the same audience information, participants’ mental representation of the assigned audience was different. Student A, the less proficient writer, formulated her conceptualization by drawing on general characteristics with a focus on knowledge and the nationality of the assigned reader. Some of her conceptualizations appeared incongruent with the given audience information. For example, she conceptualized the assigned audience as a western leader, unfamiliar with or even skeptical of the effectiveness of Feng-Shui but familiar with or even believing in astrology. While, student B, the more proficient writer, formulated a more articulated and judgmental conceptualization with a focus on the disposition and the status of the audience. For example, she perceived the target audience as irrational and superstitious. Although participants were required to write to the U.S. president and did take the assigned audience into consideration, they represented multiple audiences throughout their writing process.

Nevertheless, both participants appeared to represent their more familiar reader, their English writing teacher most of the time. During planning, both students employed their schemas of academic writing for their plans, such as generating three supports for their essays. When evaluating or revising their writing, both students verbalized several comments based on their own concepts of what a good English writing is, such as the coherence of their sentences and the logical order of their arguments. Thus, they appeared to target their writing to their teacher audience. As such, there were relatively few comments targeting the assigned audience in the protocols and they appeared more concerned with appropriateness, clarity and accuracy.

Audience adaptation

In discussing audience adaptation, the present analysis examined the rhetorical strategies in the text as well as measured the level of conscious audience adaptation on the part of the writer. The textual analysis is discussed in terms of naming moves, context moves, strategy moves, response moves, and inappropriate/negative moves (See Table 2). The analysis of the writers’ audience awareness was based on the discourse-based interview in which students identified the reasons or strategies for each of their arguments, appeals, or adaptations.

Table 2: Audience moves

	A	B
A. Naming moves	8	0
B. Context moves	2	2
C. Strategy moves		
C1. Appeal to readers' self-interest	7	4
C2. State readers' responsibilities and obligations		3
C3. Define readers' circumstances and characteristics	1	2
C4. Appeal to readers' emotions		3
C5. Allay the readers' emotions	1	
C6. Suggest readers' choices		4
C7. Praise readers	1	
C8. Establish shared features between readers and writers		
C9. Ask readers to take action	2	2
Total	12	18
D. Response moves		
D1. State readers' concerns		1
D2. Give reasons for these concerns		1
D3. Respond to these concerns through rebuttal, concession or accommodation	2	11
Total	2	13
E. Inappropriate/negative moves		
E1. Blame readers or attempt to make them feel guilty		9
E2. Give arguments that were inappropriate or ineffective for the specified readers	26	5
E3. Fail to consider readers' needs for clarification of terms		
E4. Use vague language		
E5. Use ambiguous pronoun	2	1
Total	29	15

Naming moves

Naming moves is one of the main audience strategies in student A's essay. She addressed the target audience directly by using the pronoun "you" in both drafts (eight out of 37). By contrast, student B built a detached relationship with the target reader and never addressed the target reader directly in her text. She always referred to the target reader as "the President" or "he" throughout the essay. Student B appeared to conform to the genre of traditional school-sponsored writing, in which the uses of first and second pronouns are not recommended.

Context moves

Both writers abruptly introduced the topic and rushed to state their own position to the issue raised, making little attempt to establish the context and to give background information for the reader. Student A pointed out the fact that she grew up in a Chinese culture ("as a Chinese people"), which serves as the starting point to establish her credibility as an authority to discuss the practice "Feng-Shui", and immediately she plunged into claiming her own position on the proposed issue. Similarly, student B indicated her understanding of the hypothetical situations the U.S. president

went through (“although I can realize these difficult problems, which the U.S. president is encountering”) and then she switched to advocate her viewpoint. Apparently, both writers have assumed their intended readers have read the prompt and shared the background information so that they excluded all background information in their introduction.

Strategy moves

Both students appeared to employ quite diverse strategy activities to appeal to their readers. However, student A usually made the strategy moves as didactic, discrete statement without support and argument while student B is better able to give more elaborate strategy moves. Their majority strategy moves had to do with “appeal to reader’s self-interest”. For example, Student A wrote, “Implementing Feng-Shui is a way to show that America is really a democratic country and the main spirit of American history is democratic spirit.” In student B’s text, “The president will lose the faith of his citizens.” Such a stance not only enhances persuasiveness but in the case of the adversarial audience (such as in student B’s text), it also indicates an empathic ability to enter into the perspective of someone different from oneself while at the same time retaining one’s own position.

Student B also defined her reader’s responsibilities: “The president should be wise and mature, and he has to think twice before doing anything, because this affects the future and destiny of all citizens.” These reader definitions were frequently elaborated and supported with suggestions for ways in which the reader might carry out such responsibilities. For example, she wrote, “I think the president should consider the causes of these problems and search for the solutions, and these actions will definitely solve his problems.”

Response moves

The response activity identified dialectical activity between writer and her target reader--recognizing the target reader’s concern, the reader’s reasons for each concern, and the writer’s response to those concerns through rebuttal or concession. Hays et al. (1990) argued that response activity “tapped into the flexibility of writers’ thinking about the topic, and specifically into the degree to which they could examine more than one aspect of the subject and question their own assumptions about it (p.261).” Student A did not articulate the reader’s concerns and give reasons for those concerns. Instead, she answered the reader’s concerns by dismissing readers’ objections without support. For example, she wrote, “So, combining Chinese traditional culture (Feng-Shui) and American history --- the White House is the best way to show multiculturalism.” This response was offered as a didactic, discrete claim without support or argument. The rationale of her claim and explication of this viewpoint have never been elaborated.

Also, the dialectical movement was minimal in student A’s text. For example, she said, “People who against implement Feng-Shui in the White House should understand this conception.” In this statement, she pointed out the objections that the President had to deal with before implementing Feng-Shui in the White House. Yet, she proposed this anti-thesis without examining the contrary viewpoint and the rationale for it. She just made the point and then proceeded to answer the potential objections with unsupported dismissals of readers’ objections. She argued, “Do not think Feng-Shui as some strange stuff or cannot accept it. It’s just like many Western people believe that divine by astrology can reform their bad situation or know something about their future.” By making allusions that Chinese Feng-Shui functions like Western astrology as her rebuttal, she did

not go on to explain why then Feng-Shui could be a legitimate means to problem-solving or can be incorporated into American culture. These are the contrary points challenged the President’s position.

By contrast, the more proficient student B engaged in more response activities. Part of the reason was that the writer and assigned reader are in the oppositional relationship and that invites more dialectical thinking. In her texts, the reader’s probable position was stated more fully, but similar to the less proficient student, her rush to rebuttal was evident. “It seems that there is no scientific relationship between Feng-Shui and the solutions of these problems.” Also, her texts assumed a simple thesis-antithesis-synthesis pattern, which is an early rather than mature manifestation of dialectical thought (Basseches, 1984).

Inappropriate/negative moves

Both employed a rather great amount of unproductive moves. For the less proficient writer, more than half of her audience moves were inappropriate while the more proficient ones, almost one-third were negative or inappropriate.

Student A appeared to have difficulties accurately conceptualizing the situation the target reader encountered and failed to anticipate the potential objections from the target reader. She was not able to recognize that even the target reader, who took the same position with her, may not generally agree with all her points. As such, more than half of her arguments are ineffective (29 out of 53) and begged more questions from the target reader. Most of these inappropriate moves were digressions from a main argument or invoking a reader incongruent with the given audience information. For example, “Feng-Shui and astrology are also a kind of science, they all have some unknown and magical, mystical aspects. But, there still are much phenomenon show that they did work vastly.” In this statement, student A appeared to assume that the U.S. President was suspicious of the effectiveness of Feng-Shui. Such conceptualization is contradictory to the information given in the prompt.

Likewise, student B engaged in several “negative” audience activities that would antagonize her readers. She often accused the president of acting irrationally or immaturity. For example, she wrote “As a president must not be so superstitious that he makes some changes on a irrational whim.” Sometimes, she employed emotional-charged words, which may annoy the specified reader, such as “Feng-Shui is negative and impractical in that people will think everything will be improved owing to decoration but not their efforts.” Sometimes, she bluntly claimed that “this is useless” or “I do not think so” without any elaborations. The writer often blamed the president, the target reader as “superstitious” or “ impractical”, which implied that she did not consider that the reader might have a legitimate position on the issue.

For the level of writer’s conscious audience awareness, each student made a total of six audience adaptations. Both writers’ justifications were rated at level three or lower (See Table 3).

Table 3: Audience adaptation for student A & B

	Level one	Level two	Level three	Level four	Level five	Level six	Total
A	1	1	4				6
B	3	2	1				6

The majority of student A's justifications for her arguments (four out of six) were made at level of three of hierarchy. That is, she made general justifications in terms of the assigned audience's beliefs, values, or knowledge. The remaining two of her justifications were made either in terms of general values she presumed to be held by the target's audience or in terms external to the perspective of the target audience. Her justifications reflected that student A held a general perception of the assigned audience with some inferences of the audience's knowledge and beliefs.

Half of student B's adaptations were made at level one. In other words, she justified her adaptations in terms external to the perspective of the assigned audience. Two of her justifications were made in terms of general values she presumed to be held by the target audience. Only one justification was made in terms of the assigned audience's beliefs, values, or knowledge. The level of her audience adaptations seemed to be low in terms of her more audience-adapted text than student A's text. This may be due in part to the nature of the measure. This measure is designed to examine the level of writer's conscious audience adaptation. Therefore, this measure indicated that student B did not consciously adapt her writing to the assigned audience as student A did. When she explained her rationale for each argument or appeal, she usually re-read her supporting reason from her essay with little conscious awareness of the specified reader.

Conclusion

Both participants were able to formulate their conceptualizations of the assigned audience from the writing prompt and their experiences as writers. The more proficient writer was more capable of analyzing and making inferences of the assigned audience than the less proficient writer. Her conceptualization of the assigned audience was also richer and more articulated. As such, her text was more effective. Nevertheless, both participants as freshmen writers were not able to analyze and infer audience in great details. They may benefit from brainstorming in small groups about the various dimensions of their intended reader, such as the characteristics, values, beliefs, knowledge, and goals of the target reader. Also, participants appeared to attend to the assigned audience at two stages in their writing process, at the beginning and revising stages. Thus, audience accommodation should be a focused revising activity in the EFL writing classroom since they are more concerned with other composing demands in the drafting stage.

Both participants were able to employ a great quantity and variety of more obvious audience appeals, such as strategy move but not response move. It seems difficult for them to evaluate their own ideas from the perspective of the assigned reader. As such, many of their arguments were ineffective or even antagonizing to the assigned reader. Since they were less able to argue from the reader's viewpoint, their texts did not adapt to the assigned reader with great success. Therefore, freshmen writers may benefit from exercises asking them to define and explain a contrary point of view and their rationale for such explanation.

Furthermore, given a well-defined audience in the writing prompt, both participants still geared their essay mainly towards their teacher audience while the data indicated that they did consider assigned audience. This is due partly to the influence of the school context. The participants knew that the real reader would not be the assigned audience but the teacher audience. So, they did not spend much energy analyzing or attending to the assigned audience in the protocols. Teachers may need to teach students how to deal with the artificial rhetorical situation of school. In this study, participants' use of teacher audience was an effective strategy only to a certain extent. Moreover,

although they were able to represent multiple audiences, they were not very successful in dealing with these audiences whose goals and needs sometimes conflicted. Thus, some researchers (Ryder, et al. 1999) suggested that to content with the artificial school context, teachers can inform their students of writing to the assigned reader and the teachers will evaluate whether students' writing are effective to the assigned reader. Yet, this theory still needs to be examined empirically.

Another area of concern is the role reading plays on the EFL students' ability to deal with audience demands. Are better L2 readers more able to assume the role of the audience? How much does the writer's experience as a reader influence his/her ability to analyze and accommodate audience in the writing?

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