ENHANCING AUDIENCE AWARENESS OF CHINESE SECOND LANGUAGE WRITERS IN SINO-US WRITING PROGRAMME

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore in the second language writing how Chinese university students enhance their audience awareness linguistically and culturally in web-based Sino-US peer-editing programmed Cross-Pacific Exchange with Pennsylvania State University. The programmed has lasted 6 years since 2009. This research will be focused on the two-week project about review writing on two films ---Blind Mountain (1997 in China) and Nightmare (1976 in America), which are related to gender and social issues (woman trafficking, drowning of new-born baby girls, racism between white and black people, illegal use of prisoners as slaves and etc.) Twenty-three pairs of Chinese-American students conducted peer-editing, kept close contact on our Program website. Descriptive methodology is adopted---analysis of students' works (including the first draft, revised drafts, peer-editing and reflection). Under Hyland's Stance and Engagement Model, the study suggests that through contact with native target readers, the audience awareness of Chinese students has been greatly raised both at linguistic and cultural levels to achieve shared knowledge, like avoiding the meaning tangled by using unnecessary formal complicated words, more aware of the semantic prosody, appropriate use of

thesis statement and topic sentences; and trying to understand other's culture as well as appropriately to deliver their own cultural value.

Keywords

Audience Awareness, Second Language Writers, Hyland's Stance and Engagement Model, Sino-US Writing Programmer, Descriptive Study

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1. Introduction

Since 2009 nineteen rounds of the Cross-Pacific Writing Programmer have been conducted online between Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China and some American or New Zealand universities (mainly the Pennsylvania State University, sometimes Millersville University or Victoria University of Wellington). For 14 rounds of exchange focusing on linguistic aspects, Chinese students' compositions of different topics and genres were available in the webpage, waiting for comments from their prospective American pen-pals, who also uploaded their own writings to the webpage for their Chinese peers' comments. In another 5 rounds of exchange, more attention was drawn to cultural aspects. Attempts were made to have a discussion on the popular Chinese and American films (11th, 12th and 17th rounds) or the comparison between two short stories, "A Place Where No One Knows Your Face "by Emily Perkins, a famous writer of contemporary New Zealand and "A Man Like Him" by Yiyun Li, a Chinese writer who lives in America (14th round).

In this paper, the 19th round is under discussion. It is a two-week Sino-U.S. programmer on the comparison between *Blind Mountain* (1997 in China) and *Nightmare* (1976 in America), which touch upon more serious social problems and gender issues---woman trafficking, drowning of new-born baby girls, racism between white and black people, illegal use of prisoners as slaves and etc. This brings active exchange of ideas between Chinese and American students, who try to understand each other's cultures. This study investigates how the Chinese second-language student writers enhance their audience awareness linguistically and culturally through the programmer.
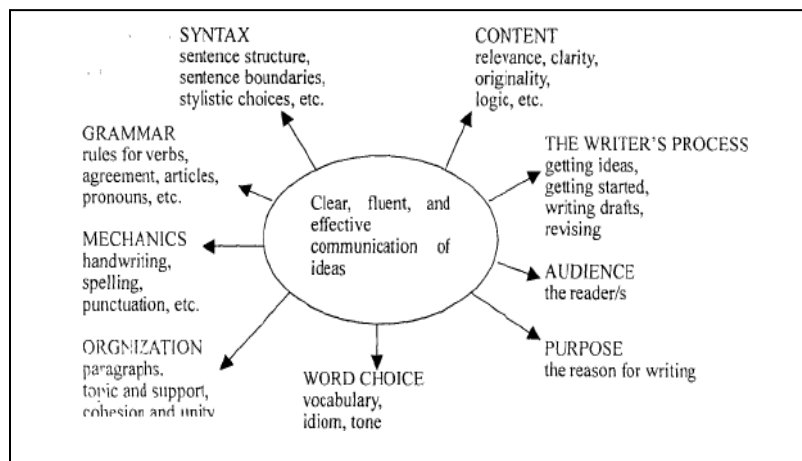
2. Theoretical Framework

Figure 1: *Components of writing (Raimes, 1983, p.5)*

Many factors influence the quality of writing. Classroom writing for second language learners (SLLs) has long focused much on the linguistic aspects of the essay itself without much consideration of audience. A lot of work has been done to investigate how to improve SLLs' linguistic ability, including complexity of vocabulary, idiomaticity of expressions, syntax, organization and style. Raimes' 1983 diagram of writing indicates besides the above-mentioned aspects, one factor cannot be ignored---audience. Learners' writing should not be simply regarded as assignment or part of exams for assessment. It is of more significance to motivate them by arousing their awareness of the audience.

2.1 Audience

The term audience refers to actual or implied readers (Ede, Lisa, 1984). One toward actual people external to a text, the audience whom the writer must accommodate; the other toward the text itself and the audience implied there, a set of suggested or evoked attitudes, interests, reactions, conditions of knowledge which may or may not fit with the qualities of actual readers or listeners (Park, 1982, p.243) Either for implied or actual readers, writers should understand or predict the needs or anticipation of audience so as to deliver the message in an appropriate way.

2.2 Audience Awareness and its Development

"No matter who/what the audience is (from real people to fictional construct), writers adjust their discourse to their audience. In other words, writers do things to bring their readers into their texts, to establish a community that includes themselves and their readers" (Wildman,

1988, p. 215) That is to say, the writers realize who are the target or potential readers, consider their gender, age, educational level, occupations, social and cultural background and then consciously engage them with certain techniques or corresponding schematic structures.

To date audience awareness has experienced several major movements. Historically, in the respect of rhetoric, different from new or expressive rhetoric which decentered the audience role, the classical and neo-classical rhetoric emphasized audience as a key element in creating effective texts. Aristotle, in classical rhetoric, who identified audience as one of the three elements that created speech (speaker, subject and object), contended that "the hearer determines the speech's end and object" (Aristotle, 1954, p.45). In modern written communication, in the 60s and 70s, writing communication research focused primarily on issues of classical audience analysis, identifying them demographically and ensuring that texts were written clearly to the correct type and level of readers. In the 80s and 90s, linguistic communication that developed from cognitive psychology and reader response theory emphasized the use of documents by user to do something, with a focus on how texts are organized and what signals are provided visually to aid the readers. In the 80s and 90s, the social approach emphasized situation/context, ethics, and cultural/organizational influences that affected writers and readers and texts. For whichever approach, the writers often move back and forth through to the imagined (invoked) and real (addressed) audience in the process. (Han, 2004, pp.23-24)

2.3 The significance of Present Study—from Imaginary to Real Audience

In 1984, researchers like Ede and Lunsford classified audience into "addressed" and "invoked". The former one is based on the writer's analysis of audience's characteristics, beliefs, and attitudes while the latter is dependent on writer's construction of an ideal image for readers to fit in the comprehension process. Methods to analyze audience were further developed in 1997 by Schriver (p.160) ---classification-driven, intuition-driven and feedback-driven. The classification-driven approach attempts to create profiles of audience using questions to get the writer to reflect on the characteristics of the audience. The intuition-driven method relies on the fact that the writer's experience with audience in the writer's head will guide decisions made about the final written product. The feedback-driven model incorporates methods for studying real audience such as usability testing and ethnographic studies to collect information about how an audience interacts with the text. Classification-driven or intuition-driven methods deal with the imaginary or implied audience while the feedback-driven model invites the real audience into

the same community. The previous two are much employed in classroom practice but the feedback one is the least used simply because of the difficulty in finding the real audience. Even audience are found to give feedback, they are usually the teachers or peer students, not the audience in real sense, who have their own demands and probably are different in age, gender, cultural and social background.

The 19th round of Sino-US writing program me is a good example to observe how the Chinese SLLs interacts with real audience—the American pen-pals, coupled with discussion, defense, clarification and negotiation. From imaginary audience in mind to real audience present, students have revised their essays accordingly both in linguistic and cultural aspects. The enhancement of audience awareness can be analyzed with the help of Hyland's Stance and Engagement Model.

2.4 Hyland's Stance and Engagement Model (2005)

Hyland's Stance and Engagement Model of Interaction in academic discourse deals with how academic writers use language to express a stance and relate to their readers (2005, pp. 173-92). These interactions are managed by writers in two main ways.

- *Stance*. They express a textual "voice" or community recognized personality which, following others, I shall call *stance*. This can be seen as an attitudinal dimension and includes features which refer to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments. It is the ways that writers intrude to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement.

- *Engagement*. Writers relate to their readers with respect to the positions advanced in the text, which I call *engagement* (Hyland, 2001). This is an alignment dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognizing the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their argument, focusing their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to interpretations. (Hyland, 2005, p.176)
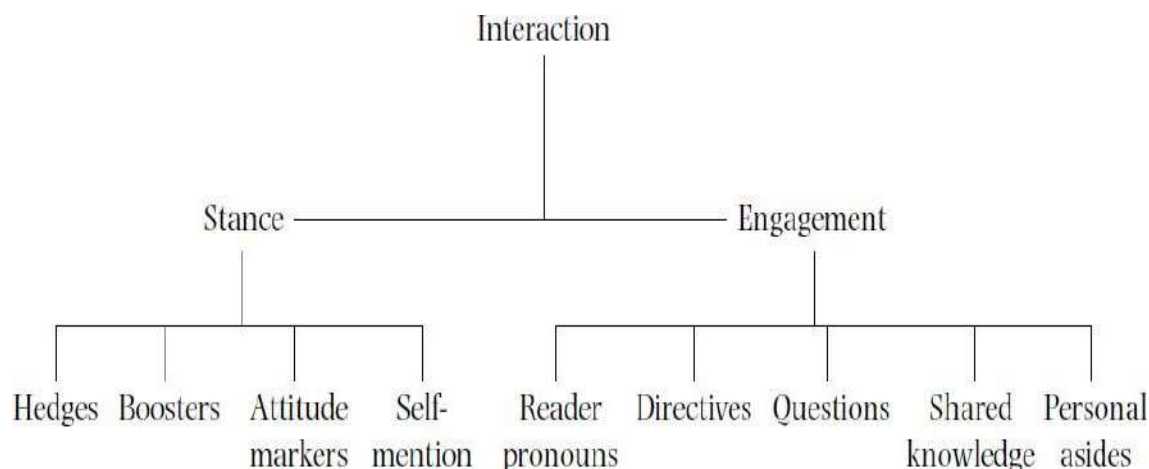
Figure 2: *Hyland's Stance and Engagement Model*

(Hyland, 2005, p.177)

Both stance and engagement contribute to the interpersonal dimension of discourse. There are overlaps between them. In spite of with more focus on writer's position in *stance,* attention to communication with readers is not absent.

3. Method

3.1 Design

The present study aimed at investigating the features in Chinese SLLs' writing in Sino-US programmer so as to ascertain to what extent they take the audience into consideration. They were asked to do two-week online peer-editing with American pen-pals on two films *Blind Mountain* and *Nightmare*.

3.2 Participants

This study was conducted with the participation of 23 second-year Chinese English majors from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China and 23 American undergraduate students from different departments of Penn State University, U.S. All of them had received some basic training about exposition and argumentation.

3.3 Instruments

Three instruments were employed, including two films from officially released DVDs, webpage (http://www.l2china.com/exchange/stage19), and Hyland's stance and engagement model (2005).

3.4 Procedure

Both Chinese and American students were required to write essays to compare the two movies—*Blind Mountain* (1997 in China) and *Nightmare* (1976 in America), both of which relate the theme to gender, legal system and other social problems. *Blind Mountain* tells a story of the young college graduate Bai Xuemei, who is tricked, drugged and sold to a remote village as a wife. She is detained and raped by her so-called husband. Trying to escape several times in vain, she can do nothing but stay. None of the village people help her except a little boy, who posts a mail for Bai to her father. Bai's father brings the police to rescue, but is driven away by the raging village people. In despair and indignation, Bai axes her husband. In *Nightmare*, two young college girls Cathy and Diane offend the sheriff during their journey in a town in south America. They are thrown into a prison on the sheriff's false accusations and forced to work as slaves on the farms. Diane, the black girl, is raped and exposed to crueler mistreatment. Cathy is finally saved by her father but Diane dies for Cathy in an escape.

After the first draft, Chinese students did peer-review among themselves, with each author having two reviewers. Then the revised drafts were posted online for two-week peer-review with their American pen-pals. At the end of programmer, all students revised their essays accordingly and wrote their reflection or suggestions.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Imaginary audience—stance

In the Chinese students' first peer-review, they knew they would have an audience and the audience would be American students, but what the audience expected or wanted were still vague to them. The peer review was based on their assumption or prior knowledge. In this case, features of **stance** are more salient than **engagement**. Among the four kinds of stance features, attitude markers and self-mention are quite obvious.

According to Hyland, *attitude markers* indicate the writer's affective attitude to propositions, conveying surprise, agreement, importance, frustration, and so on, rather than commitment. It is most explicitly signaled by attitude verbs (e.g. *agree, prefer*), sentence adverbs (*unfortunately, hopefully*), and adjectives (*appropriate, logical, remarkable*). *Self-mention* refers to the use of first person pronouns and possessive adjectives to present propositional, affective and interpersonal information (Hyland, 2001). It is a way to seek agreement for it. (Hyland,

2005, pp.180-81) The authors tend to focus more on stating or explaining their propositions.

I stored all Chinese students' first and second drafts in txt format for the sake of concordance in Ant Conc Corpus tool. When all the first drafts[1] were uploaded in the tool, there were 144 concordance hit of "I".
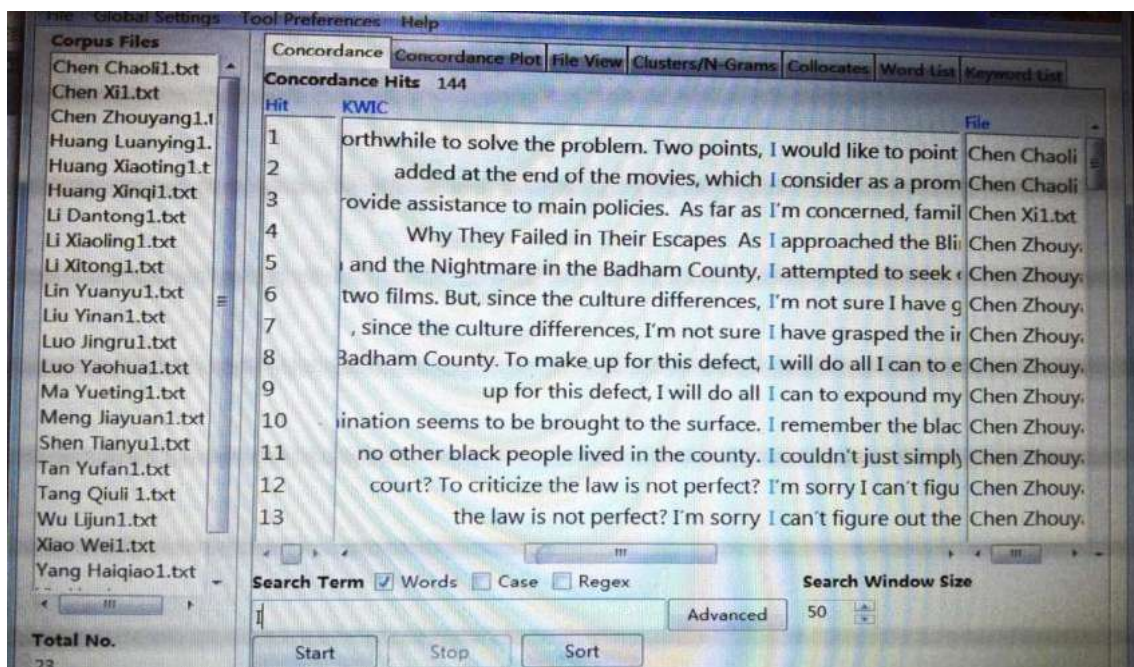

Figure 3: *Concordance result of "I"*

Some examples are listed here:

"Before watching these two films, I thought they might be kind of horrific, because of the names. During watching them, my heart was filled with anxiety. After watching the films, I was haunted by an unspeakable taste, which seemed like there was a black hole in my heart, and the cold wind was blowing through that hole continuously."(Li Dantong)

"I remember the mother-in-law kept persuading the abducted girl to stay with her son."(Li Xiaoling)

"I had always thought that democracy, freedom and human rights are symbols in the U.S. But in this movie, I found that the sheriff, the judge and the head of Labor Farm collaborated in evildoing in Badham County." (Li Xiaoling)

The attitudes markers are not without notice.

"After watching the movies, I was <u>shocked</u>, feeling so <u>sorry</u> for the girls who had suffered such intolerable pains. I was <u>extremely angry</u> when I saw how the family treated

Xuemei in Blind Mountain. And I almost cried when I heard that Diane was shot by Officer Tim, who had <u>cruelly</u> brought the two girls, Cathy and Diane into the horrible nightmare. " (Tang Qiuli)

"My <u>astonishment</u> was beyond description when I saw these two films. Me, myself am a college girl like them. While I am blessed with a happy university life, they went through such unspeakable experience."(Zhong Wen)

"The word '<u>shock</u>' was too gentle to describe my feelings after watching these two movies. Although I knew that as the vulnerable group, female had encountered discrimination or unfair treatment all along, I was still <u>totally stunned</u> by what had happened in the movies."(Li Xiaoling)

"It seems hard for me to imagine and feel such misery of women in this equal and peaceful campus life. But the two movies <u>have got me crying and yelling loud </u>for half an hour in my friend's hug to calm myself down…"(Luo Jingru) With personal feelings involved, the writers expect to share their opinions or feelings with the audience, trying to shorten the distance between authors and readers.

They were also concerned about the American pen-pals' possible responses. Some comments of the reviewers are quoted here:

"nothing inappropriate that will offend the foreign readers; trying to write more about the American movie *Nightmare*." (Meng Jiayuan)

"Your guess is not well-founded. Please don't mislead the American friends though the story is disheartening." (Luo Yaohua)

4.2 Real Audience (feedback-driven) - Engagement

After frequent exchange of ideas with the American friends, Chinese SLLs have realized the gap in linguistic as well as the cultural aspects. In engaging the audience, one of the important techniques needs to be used   shared knowledge. "*Appeals to shared knowledge* seek to position readers within apparently naturalized boundaries of disciplinary understandings. The notion of 'sharedness' is often invoked by writers to smuggle contested ideas into their argument …referring to the presence of explicit markers where readers are asked to recognize something as familiar or accepted." (Hyland, 2005, p.184) Here the shared knowledge not just only refers to cultural but also linguistic areas.

4.2.1 Linguistic awareness enhanced

Lexical Level

Suggestions from the American students were given to the lexical as well as discourse levels. For lexical areas, more attention was drawn to word choice and collocations. The American counterparts were quite amazed at Chinese students' size of vocabulary and fluency of the language, but they found inappropriate "big words" or problematic use of words.

For example, Shannon said, "I think I can safely say that most Americans don't use that word (chagrined). We would probably use the word, annoyed or irritated." I am glad to know about this, because it seems that there is little chance to figure out the common language usage in English-speaking countries. (Lin Yanyu's reflection)

"She also mentions that I write some weird expressions that is anything but idiomatic to them, some awkward usages of words. After seeing my request she gave me concrete example as follows. 'Justice doesn't serve via the policemen' sounds awkward. It would sound better if you were to say 'justice was not served by the policemen.' And I think sometimes, like many Chinese English learners, I would misuse some 'big words' we look up in the dictionary when writing but actually in native speakers' daily life they wouldn't use them in that way. It's like in theory and in practice. "(Huang Xenia's reflection)

Discourse Level

Most of the Chinese students found great differences in 1) writing the thesis statement and topic sentences; 2) paragraphing and 3) transitional markers .

Chinese writing is more inductive while English writing is more deductive. English writing usually puts the thesis statement from the beginning to guide the whole essay and clearly states the topic sentences in almost every paragraph. But the Chinese writing neither requires the immediate appearance of the central idea in the introduction nor obvious topic sentences for each paragraph. The theme of the essay often occurs at the end after all the clarification and explanation. The topic sentences are not necessary explicit or present. Due to the lack of topic sentences in paragraphs, Chinese students' way to paragraph differs from the American counterparts. These were noticed by Chinese SLLs.

"Through this experience, I notice that American students often list out what they are going to say at the first paragraph. That's, listing out the main points at first just like putting their first names before the family names. I like this kind of structure which makes me get the main

ideas very fast. Maybe there is a cultural difference existing between American students' passages and Chinese students'. As I notice among Chinese students' articles including mine, the main points are often concluded at the end of the passages." (Tang Qiuli's reflection)

"Thesis statement is important! With a thesis statement, people can more easily get what we want to convey in the essay." (Li Xiao ling's reflection)

"They both pointed out it would be better to highlight thesis statements in my essay, which I appreciate very much."(Lin Yanyu's reflection)

"I think the structure of American students' essay is much clearer than mine. They have topic sentence in every paragraph, which makes it easy for readers to follow. For example, they use such phrases (like 'another similar issue / unlike the other film/ another large theme/ another important aspect') to inform the readers of what they are going to talk about. When it comes to the end of each paragraph, they will again emphasize the theme. So in this version, I tried to make my essay's structure clear and deleted some unimportant description. " (Huang Luanying's reflection)

English is mostly a synthetic language, characterized by frequent and systematic use of inflected forms to express grammatical relationships. Chinese is an analytic language, characterized by a relatively frequent use of function words, auxiliary verbs, and changes in word order to express syntactic relations, rather than of inflected forms. The logical relationship in Chinese is usually expressed through the word order instead of by explicit transitional markers, which are important in English writing. One Chinese student reflected, "I use more transitional words throughout my whole essay (for my second draft)" (Wu Lijun's reflection).

4.2.2 Cultural Awareness Enhanced

Another benefit gained from this exchange is a cultural one. The Chinese and American students hold a different opinion or perspective on the similar social problem.

Table 1: *Chinese and American students' different perspectives*

	Chinese	American
In both movies, Bai Xumei, Cathy and Diane didn't get help from the local people.	poor education on law	social cohesion
	collective unconsiouseness (the Crowd)	by-stander effect

"I accepted the comments by Samantha that the reason of the tragedies of these two girls not only due to the badly enforced law but also the social cohesion." (Wu Lijun's reflection)

"As for the reason The American movie town helped each other in the legal activity, I believe it had to do with cohesion. The community is united as a whole and mutually benefits off each other's illegal activity. You may be right in saying that its because some are scarred and only worry about themselves but throughout the movie it showed examples of the benefits." (Samantha's comments)

"Out of my expectation, the Crowd seems to be not as popular in U.S.A as in China. As a result, I learn that if I want to illustrate some ideas to people with different culture, I have to search some relevant concepts which are popular in their culture, like "bystander effect", and then compare the ideas with the concepts so that I can well deliver my ideas to others and become reader friendly." (Tan Yufan's reflection)

With appeals to shared knowledge in mind, audiences are more easily included in the author-reader interaction or communication.

5. Conclusion and Implication

The 19th round of Cross-Pacific exchange largely raises Chinese SLLs' audience awareness. From imaginary to real audience, they have been more aware of the differences and gaps in linguistic features, thinking patterns and cultural positions. The revision is more audience-oriented. Hyland's stance and engagement model helps clarify the interaction process and implies that through active interaction, alignment takes effect. The language ability of Chinese SLLs has been improved and their cultural awareness is greatly enhanced.

Students of both sides are highly motivated. All the participants admit the benefits they have from it especially culturally. One Chinese student said, "Before that, in my mind, America

is just an intangible country, but through connections with some American students, I feel America isn't an invisible country anymore." From imaginary to real audience, they have been more aware of the differences and gaps in linguistic features, thinking patterns and cultural positions. One American student said, "The border crossing activity is, in my opinion, the most interesting assignment we have completed this semester. It has given us a chance to communicate with people outside of our class and our typical realm of communication."

There is still much to be done for the activity and research. Students expect the programmed to be longer and have a better negotiation of time. Teachers of both sides might give more timely guidance to make it more fruitful. This study is only a qualitative one. In the near future, corpora are expected to be established for researchers to have an in-depth quantitative analysis.

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