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THE DYNAMIC MODEL OF WRITING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FL CLASSROOM

Abstract

The dynamic model of writing proposed by Matsuda (1997) is intended to visualize the complexity of interrelationships between the writer, text, and reader in second language writing instruction. Contrary to the static model, the dynamic model assumes an active role of the writer and acknowledges the writer's contribution not only to the text, but also to communication with the writer, and—as a consequence—accounts for intercultural interaction and negotiation of meaning. Because in the context of foreign language writing Matsuda's dynamic model is usually unrealistic, this paper proposes a model of foreign language writing which combines features of both the static and dynamic models to illustrate the unique complexity of foreign language writing.

1. Introduction

Writing in a foreign language has received relatively little attention so far. On the one hand, whether rightfully or not, Communicative Language Teaching is commonly equalled to teaching oral communication; on the other, writing in a second language is a fast-developing field, and those who do deal with writing in a foreign language may be tempted to import assumptions true for second language to their context. There are, however, considerations within the broadly understood L2 teaching and learning that account for significant differences between writing in a second and foreign language.

This paper proposes a model of foreign language writing which, while based on a second language writing theory, reflects the uniqueness of foreign language instruction. At the same time, the model described here points to the challenges that face foreign language writers and writing instructors.

2. Second and foreign language writing

In spite of many obvious similarities, second and foreign language writing are governed by distinctly different rules. First of all, because foreign language writing typically takes place outside the target language speech community, it depends to a greater extent on student attitudes, and it involves different student-teacher relations than writing in a second language. Also student motivation patterns may differ between foreign and second language writers, mainly because, while second language writers often write in an academic context, foreign language learners usually have little idea of how they will use their writing skills, and indeed most of them do not get a chance to write in L2. All these lead to differences in openness to new experience, motivation, willingness to cooperate with teacher as well as with peers.

While culture-specific differences in L2 writing have been the subject of contrastive rhetoric studies since 1960s (Kaplan, 1966, 1987; Connor, 1997), this body of research has relied solely on text analysis. It is interesting that, although contrastive rhetoric has been criticized in the second language context, where was it originated, it is still quite popular among researchers of foreign language writing (Golebiowski, 2006;Yakhontova, 2006; Petrič, 2005). This can be attributed to the fact that contrastive rhetoric may benefit writing instruction by offering a clear aim in the form of target language organizational patterns, which can be much more difficult to adjust to, given the limited target language input in the foreign language context. However, because contrastive rhetoric remains within the tradition of current traditional rhetoric, it cannot account fully for the differences between writers coming from native and foreign cultural backgrounds.

To obtain a full picture of the phenomena involved in foreign language writing, it is necessary, on the one hand, to investigate foreign language writing processes. Recently, for example, Manchón, Roca de Larios, and Murphy (2009) have reported on temporal findings and the balance of foreign and native language use by Spanish EFL students working on writing tasks. Two earlier studies focused on differences in L1 and L2 writing processes of inexperienced and proficient Polish advanced EFL learners (Skibniewski 1986; Skibniewski and Skibniewska, 1988). On the other hand, however, it is necessary to analyze the context in which foreign language writing takes place. The relations between writers, influenced by their first language, tradition, education, and their readers shape not only the medium of their communication—the text—but may influence all parties involved. In the following sections a number of models of L2 writing will be discussed, which depict the intricate interrelationships between the elements of L2 writing processes.

3. The static and dynamic models of second language writing

In his 1997 article, Matsuda proposes a distinction between the traditional conceptualization of teaching writing and a revised view which assumes interaction between the writer and the reader.

In the traditional approach, called the static model, the ESL writer is expected to meet the reader's expectations by complying with the target language rhetorical and cultural norms. Thus, texts created by ESL writers result from the authors' background, i.e. language, culture, education, but the writers' role is solely to use that background to meet the target language readers' expectations. As seen in Figure 1, the ESL text is meant to match the readers', not the writer's context, which means that ESL writers have to adjust to the target language (or target culture) standards, and compromise their convictions and the rules they have been taught to obey when writing in their native language. As a result, the flow of communication is shown simply by arrows pointed only one way: from the writer to the text (text production) and from the text to the reader (text reception).
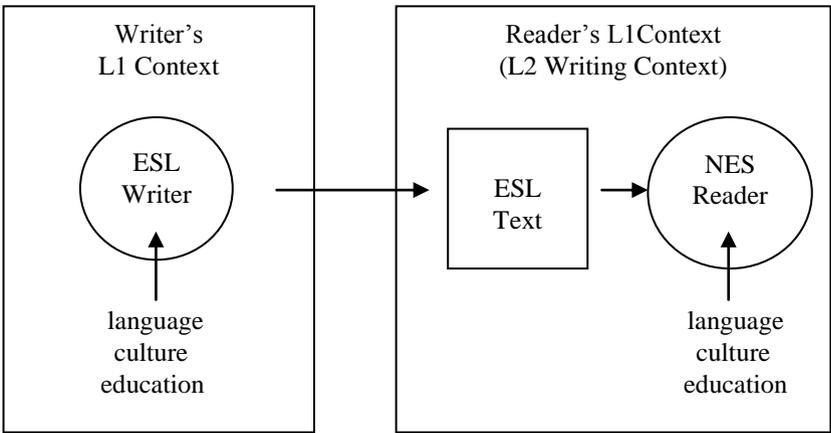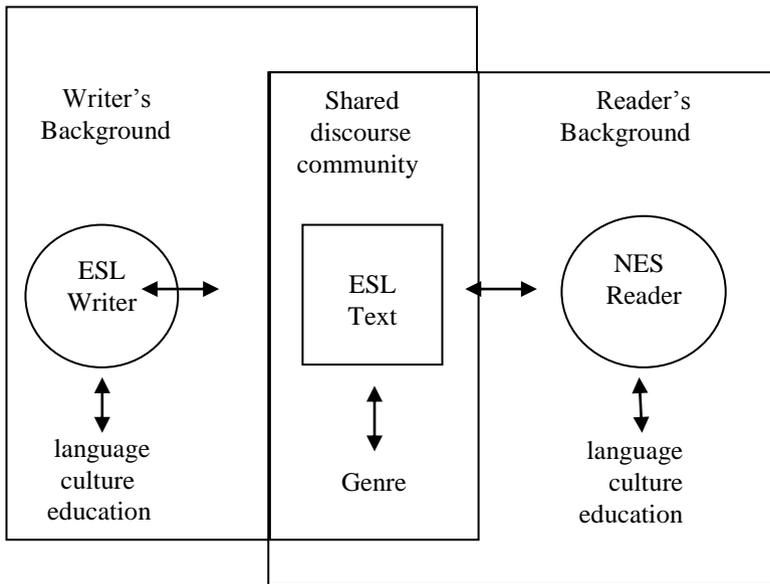

Figure 1. The static model of second language writing (after Matsuda, 1997)

Such a view of L2 writing is fully supported by traditional contrastive rhetoric, which sees the L2 writer's role as to develop an ability to compose texts which will meet the expectations of native users of the target language. Therefore, teaching writing, supported by contrastive rhetoric, aims to "provide the student with a form within which he may operate, a form acceptable in this time and in this place," and eventually to "help the foreign student to form standards of judgment consistent with the demands made upon him by the

educational system of which he has become a part" (Kaplan 1966: 19). Contrastive rhetoric has been concerned with second language writing, especially in the academic context. However, it has been widely criticized for its ethnocentrism and prescriptivism, for seeing the only merit of foreign language writing in the ability to imitate target language patterns.

On the other hand, the dynamic model of writing, proposed by Matsuda (1997), assumes reciprocal relations between the writer, the text, and the reader (illustrated by bidirectional arrows in Figure 2). Naturally, also here both the reader and the writer act within their respective contexts, determined by their native language, culture, and education, yet the text itself is addressed not to the target language context, but to the discourse community which is shared by second language writers and native language readers. The standards for the ESL texts are set by the genre which is the norm obliging all members of the discourse community, whether native or non-native language users.

Figure 2. The dynamic model of second language writing (after Matsuda, 1997)

By putting intercultural written communication in a shared discourse community, the dynamic model of ESL writing acknowledges the active role of all its participants: both readers and writers, regardless of whether they use English as a native or a second language. Communication involves mutual influence of senders and receivers of messages, even if these roles are as frequently switched in writing as in oral interaction. This does not exclude the

role of readers' and writers' backgrounds; on the contrary, their uniqueness contributes to the development of the shared discourse community and, by the same token, enriches all its members.

The dynamic model of writing is recommended for the second language writing classroom because—first of all—it allows for a more active role of the writer. The model proposed by Matsuda acknowledges the ESL author's contribution to text creation by placing the text both in the reader's and writer's context. No longer are second language writers expected solely to meet native readers expectations: their contributions, resulting from their unique backgrounds, benefit not only the second language text but also the native readers by influencing their context. What is more, both readers and writers, through the shared context of their discourse community may shape the genre they use, which is no longer seen as a fixed framework to be followed by second language learners. Likewise, through their interaction, both readers and writers are able to modify their respective backgrounds.

4. Writing in the foreign language context

While the dynamic model undoubtedly typifies the ideal second language writing situation, it cannot account fully for the foreign language writing context. The very fact that foreign language writing takes place outside the geographical boundaries of the target language community, and—more importantly—that in most cases the teacher, a native speaker of the learner's L1, is the only reader of FL texts, means that the writer has no direct contact with the target language speech community. Yet, the norms of the genre and the target culture rhetorical standards are imposed on the foreign language writer.

Such model of writing usually characterizes the foreign language classroom, because of the unavoidable artificiality of the foreign language classroom situation. Therefore, it is unrealistic to assume that Matsuda's dynamic model of second language writing could serve as a representation of writing in a foreign language. Even writing tasks which specify audience and purpose paradoxically create a barrier between the text and the outside reality. The problem lies in the fact that audience and purpose specified by the writing task create a make-belief context, which is intended only to imitate a realistic target language speech community context. Such attempts do not create a shared discourse community in the sense it is present in Matsuda's dynamic model of writing. For most foreign language writers the norms of the genre and rhetorical patterns are rules to abide by; as there is no reciprocal interdependence between the writer and the audience, these norms cannot be negotiated with the intended readership, nor can

the wealth of experience the writer brings into a text influence the audience. In this sense foreign language writing is more likely to be static than second language writing.

5. The pseudo-dynamic model of foreign language writing

To do justice to the efforts of instructors devoted to foreign language writing, this paper proposes a pseudo-dynamic model of writing, which combines elements of both static and dynamic models described by Matsuda (1997). As seen in Figure 3, although audience, purpose, and genre belong to the target language speech community, which is separate from L1 speech community, some mutual influence between writers and readers is possible. It is, however, only the real reader who physically reads the text and is able to respond to it that can engage in such interaction. More often than not, the only real reader of FL texts is the teacher, but learner texts can be also read by peers, whether in the same group or not. These readers and writers form a discourse community which becomes a forum not just for prescriptive instruction, but also for common exchanging ideas.
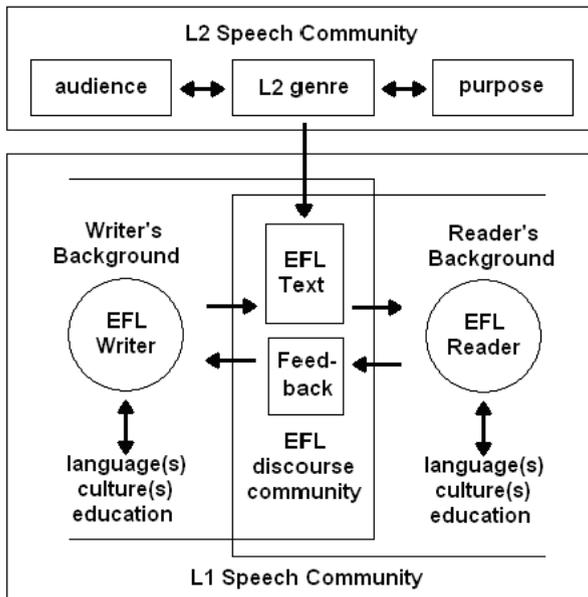
Figure 3. The pseudo-dynamic model of foreign language writing

The EFL discourse community, even though immersed within the shared L1 speech community makes it possible for writers and readers (both students and teachers) to interact, learn from and about each other, and modify each other's backgrounds. As shown in Figure 3, in formal writing instruction, feedback is commonly expected and given; still, it is a form of communication between writers and their readers, and as such it can be provided only by real readers, not the hypothetical audience from the rubric. Undoubtedly, what will motivate students to write, e.g. an article, is the awareness that someone is going to read it, and most probably comment on it, rather than instruction to to write "for English-speaking audience."

The pseudo-dynamic model of writing is proposed here to reflect the uniqueness of foreign language writing. On the one hand, it relies on models and norms imported from the target language culture; on the other, which must not be forgotten, it does involve real communication in writing. However artificial it may seem, also within the L1 speech community there is space for FL discourse communities, and the bigger the number of readers writers get for their texts, the better for them. In spite of its inherent difficulties, foreign language writing does not have to be static.
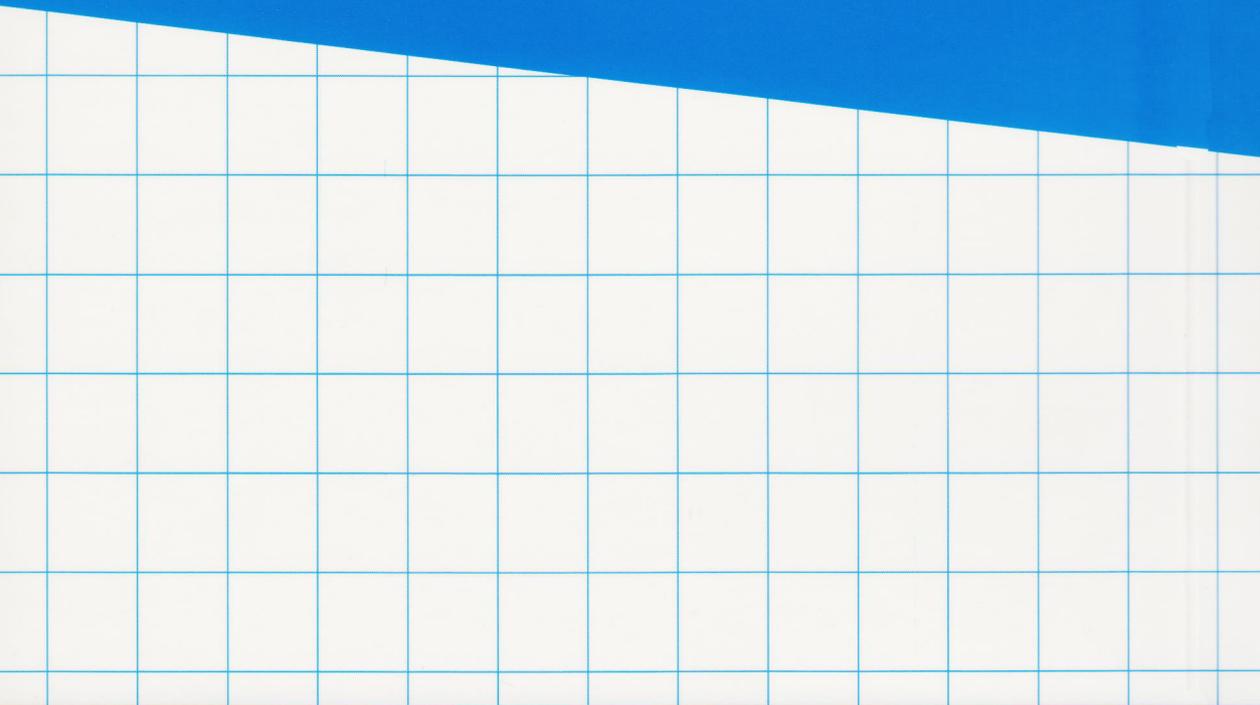
6. Conclusions

Although the static model of writing seems more universal, as it may apply to native, second and foreign language contexts, it is clearly inferior to the dynamic model. It is true that in foreign language writing instruction, the dynamic model is often hard to achieve; nevertheless, there are ways to add dynamism to FL writing. First of all, providing real readership may be achieved relatively easily by using student papers for further activities, such as discussion, or peer-reviewing. Also extensive feedback from the teacher, including content feedback or feedback on the writing process, rather than just a grade for the final product, will contribute to student writers' satisfaction and increase their motivation. The most prominent feature of the dynamic model of writing is bidirectionality of the relations between its elements, and it can be retained if flow of information and mutual influence between FL writers and their readers are ensured.

Finally, although the pseudo-dynamic model offers a more realistic picture of foreign language writing than the dynamic model, it does not exclude a dynamic model from the FL context. Seeking opportunities for establishing intercultural work groups, instructors provide students with context for meaningful communication and target language-based cooperation, which can naturally motivate learners to write.

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