Abstract

The Role of Audience Awareness in Written Communication Theory and Pedagogy

In recent years studies reported in theories of writing (social constructionism and social interactionism) and reader response have claimed that audience-directed writing instruction provides the necessary inputs for contextualized and effective written communication. A fair number of research studies have applied Walter Ong's (1975) hypothesis to the ways novelists, poets and other artists fictionalized their audience or readers. Considering this relationship between writers and readers, recently two major theories have emerged: social constructionism and social interactionism. Following Saussure's theory of structuralism and Durkheim's theory of social facts and the research work of Bizzell (1982), Faigley (1986), Fish (1980) social constructionists concerns itself with large-scale processes of writers and readers as members of standard discourse. By contrast, social interactionists influenced by Bakhtin (1973) focus directly on heteroglossic discourse that is essentially dialogical and sociological in nature rooted in material and historical process (Bakhtin, 1981; Nystrand, 1990). This study contrasts these two approaches to the problem of student-produce discourse and then examine Walter Ong's influential suggestion that writer's audience is always a fiction. Following this line of investigation the study is an attempt to trace theories of writing in terms of audience in ESL written communication contexts and tries to see its application in a class room ESL situations. The present study seeks to determine the role of audience in the development of written text and to determine whether the lack of audience consideration in classroom writing result in slow development of social-cognitive skills necessary for written communication and whether pedagogical strategies can be devised to help developing writers fictionalize so as to replace the current decontextualized approach to classroom writing and develop a contextualized one with freedom to exercise reader-response sensitivity within the constraints of class rooms.
The study used quantitative procedures to determine the writing needs analysis of undergraduate samples undertaken during 1997 as a part of the UGC project at Arunachal University, Itanagar. The findings of the study provided fresh insight into the present research concerning the empirical validation of audience awareness data of basic writers for non-literary discourse. The present investigation attempts to determine the effects of audience specification (Three treatments-Phase II): no audience, teacher as an audience and distant audience on the writing attitudes of 9 ESL post graduate students at Arunachal University, Itanagar.

In order to understand the complex nature of the factors that could influence audience-oriented writing, the technique of triangulation of data from phase I and 2 from an interview from the teachers was done in order to gather information from different sources. The performance of students from three treatments were compared to get an idea of the relative performance of students across the different audience-based tasks.

The findings of the study indicate that the target group in condition 3 (distant audience) had scored highest (mean = 12.2) than those written for familiar audience (mean = 10.55) and for no audience conditions (mean = 11.00). The basic writer's data indicated that audience specification in terms of unknown / known distant audience was better than the other treatments. However, the overall writing quality presents a range of difficulties of less-skilled writers in acquisition poor environment. Related to this, the study focuses on the role of audience awareness in explicating the social context for the writers to communicate and suggests the various socio-cognitive skills in facilitating the audience awareness.

Finally, the study suggests certain pedagogical strategies to help replace the decontextualized mode of communication so as to exercise the effects of audience awareness as a significant social variable necessary for written communication within the constraints of classroom teaching.
Organization of the Study

Chapter 1: States the formulation of the problem. The main argument of the present study had been considered in relation to the context and background of the study.

Chapter 2: Reviews the literature on historical and the empirical perspectives on theories of audience and its role as a socio-cognitive variable in the development of the written text. This includes a review of theoretical discussion of Walter Ong's reader response theories regarding fictionalizing the audience and its application to the nonliterary discourse as well as recent research studies in the field, to establish the basis for the issues raised in the study.

Chapter 3: Reviews the theories of writing, in particular the two major theories concerning the nature of relationship between readers and writers: social constructionism and social interactionism. The study contrasts these two major approaches to the problem of student-produced discourse and then examines Ong's influential suggestion that the writer's audience is always a fiction.

Chapter 4: Review of research whether writers fictionalize their audience following Ong's hypothesis of fictionalized audience and its validation in terms of theories of writing discussed in chapter-3. Analysis of the basic writer's data and the related findings to support the research questions of the current study are reported.

Chapter 5: Discusses the pedagogical potential of strategies in fictionalizing audience in an effort to replace the current decontextualized approach to classroom written communication.

Chapter 6: Findings and comments on the limitations of the present research followed by a discussion of implications and recommendations for ESL writing education.