

The Application and Implication of Communicative Writing Approach in ETIC

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Abstract—Writing is a core skill to assess learners' language output proficiency and has long been attached importance in English curriculum and pedagogy. The author reviewed the three main writing approaches in English education. They were product approach, process approach and communicative approach. It was found that communicative approach best suits China's English education curriculum and reform. Using the writing task in English Test for International Communication (ETIC) as example, this paper analyzed how the five elements in communicative approach like topic, writer, reader, language and purpose work together to shape good writing with real communication as core assessment and help to maintain learners' motivation. In the end, some suggestions on teaching communicative writing in Chinese college English class were given.

Keywords—*communicative writing; writing reform; motivation; ETIC*

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing, as one of the four basic language skills, has long been attached great importance in English curricula and classroom teaching. It's also believed to be the most significant indicator of one's language output competence and is thus applied in most language test and takes up a big part of the total score. However, Chinese college students' English writing poses the second weakest skill for their English learning, leading to their low interest and anxiety when writing. Writing is difficult, even in L1. Composing text is a complex and difficult undertaking because it requires the mindful deployment and coordination of multiple affective, cognitive, linguistic, and physical operations to accomplish goals associated with genre-and task-specific conversations, audience needs, and an author's communicative purpose [1]. There are linguistic, psychological and cognitive problems involved in writing, making it a considerable challenge to teach and learn. Traditionally, English writing is a solo activity in China, teachers distributing the task, students writing at home to make the product and teachers grading and commenting.

Then came a more interactive approach, students brainstorming first and drafting, peer reviewing, students revising and finally teachers grading and commenting. With these teaching approaches, English tests in China developed task-based composition from writing according to the given

Chinese outline to writing under the English prompts. Students use their language knowledge and try to produce correct language within the given idea frame and time limit. Meanwhile, teachers have global scoring of the submitted compositions based on how students expressed the theme through correct and clear language. This kind of writing test design restrains students language development in that students focus more on language accuracy instead of the communication of ideas. Students produce correct but mechanic expressions that are not acceptable or ineffective in real communication. English Test for International Communication (ETIC) is an ice breaker to this traditional writing approach. It is an examination system for English communication competence certification designed by China Language Assessment. The writing part in ETIC is about written communicative tasks in real working situation, like writing emails and proposals. These tasks require the examinees to write in a real role to another person or persons of a given position for concrete communicative purpose. This kind of writing engages purposes of communication and function. The mode of ETIC writing encourages student writers to convey ideas in real communicative contexts, with writing focus shifting from form to meaning, a significant return to the social function of language. The pedagogical implication of ETIC writing may exert significant changes on English writing instruction in China. In a hope of introducing communicative writing approach to college English class, the present writer in this paper is going to review the writing approaches that have influenced Chin's English education and analyze writing tasks in ETIC from the perspective of communicative writing approach.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Viewing from the development of writing curriculum home and abroad, it (writing approaches) roughly goes through three kinds of "paradigm shift": namely, form traditional "articles writing" before the sixties of last century to "the process writing" at the beginning of the seventies, and to the from the writing "communicative context writing" started and brewed in 1980s and 1990s. The three writing paradigms have given rise to a major change in curriculum and teaching at the time [2]. Unfortunately, English writing education in China is in the advocacy of communicative writing, but pedagogically remains in the stage of process writing and practically in articles writing stage.

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A. Product Approach

Traditional linguistics sees writing as the application of rules and texts as arrangements of words, clauses, and sentences. A product approach is "a traditional approach in which students are encouraged to mimic a model text, usually is presented and analyzed at an early stage [3]. Behaviorists believe that students can be taught to say exactly what they mean by learning how to put these together effectively. Under the product approach, composition is taught in a product-oriented classroom teaching mode. For instance, students may examine a model of a particular rhetorical pattern, analyze it, and then write, imitating it. Teachers grade compositions with a focus on correcting errors rather than on responding to writers' ideas [4]. The product approach seems to have support from psychology, schema and constructivism for the reasons that it is human nature to learn by imitating, sample essays provide scaffold to improve learners writing competence in structure and idea developing, and learners construct their understanding of writing in the imitation process. It's true that product approach helped many Chinese English learners practice their English writing ability in early days when leaning English for genuine communication was not a popularity. However, The traditional approach (product approach) to teaching EFL writing has been criticized for its focus on sentence-level grammar and paragraph patterns, creating the impression that good writing is correct writing, rather than considering features of writing that are important in communicating a message to a reader [4]. Writing is seen as a means of reinforcing and manipulating grammatical and rhetorical structures, not as a tool for communicating with an audience and stimulating thinking about subject matter [5].

B. Process Approach

Early in the 1960s, linguists and writing teachers in western countries began to criticize the product approach for its not considering the actual happenings in students writing process. They began advocating to study writing from the perspective of writing process with focuses on the process and method of "how to write" and the study of the writers' cognitive thinking and information processing mechanism as well as the writers' behavioral characteristics. Process approach emphasizes the idea of writing as problem-solving, with a focus on thinking and process [6]. In process writing, students are engaged in writing tasks more through a cycle approach than through a single approach. They are not expected to produce and submit complete and accurate responses in writing tasks without going through the stages of drafting and obtaining feedback on their drafts, either given by their peers or by the teacher, followed by a review of their texts[7]. The process approach aims to focus more on the different activities in the classroom that encourage the development of language use: brainstorming, group discussion and rewriting, making the writing process more collaborative [8]. The advantages of process writing are apparent in that it engages the development of writing cognitions and strategies. On the other hand, the drawbacks are also worth mentioning. Following the same process, it neglects the discourse and structure differences in essays of different genres. It is likely to turn into a mechanic process, refraining students' creative writing. Finally, it applies well to teachers of sophisticated

teaching skills and students of high-level writing knowledge and competency since this approach requires good command of English, composition knowledge, collaborative writing habit, plenty time and rich course resources [9].

C. Communicative Approach

With the development of social cognitive psychology, functional linguistics, constructivism and situational cognition theory and especially the introduction of communicative teaching approach, there came a shift from process writing to communicative-situated writing in the field of writing course. The term to name this writing is not unified. It can be called communicative writing, communication-context writing, reader-oriented writing. All these terms focus on communication, context and reader, which can be further interpreted as writers presenting ideas for effective communication to readers in a certain context. The communicative approach is concerned about "why I write in this way?". Other than the correct linguistic forms, writers in communicative approach take into consideration purpose of writing, readers, writer's role, genre, expressions, etc.. Grammatical forms pose less pressure on learners than in the two approaches discussed previously because learners use the language for genuinely communicative purposes rather than gain knowledge about the English language. In communicative language teaching, class activities that simulate real-life situations help build pragmatic, cultural, and linguistic components of L2 competence in an integrated manner. Students should be given contexts, roles, and tasks that resemble situations, roles, and tasks that they conceivably could face someday, such as helping a foreign visitor on the street or serving as a translator for a U.S. company. Communicative competence involves the ability to react mentally as well as verbally in such situations [10]. Communicative approach helps English teaching in China return to the very essence of language--communication.

III. ANALYSIS OF WRITING TASKS IN ETIC

ETIC was designed and launched by China Language Assessment, intending to provide reference for employers to recruit and select talents of English communicative competence. With communication as the focus, ETIC represents the requirements of foreign language teaching and learning in contemporary China. The part of writing tests students written language ability of specific communicative purposes. The writing topic of the task is about situations that people may encounter in real communicative context, with real elements of communicative writing like real role, real reader, real context and real purpose; and the writing context, purpose and object determine the content of article, style and language. Discourse is a product of such communicative context elements including readers, writers, style, the purpose of writing object interacting with each other. William & Peter proposed a five-element mode: topic, writer, reader, language and purpose. They work together to mould the form and the content of the article. Writing is viewed as a purposed dialogue and communication between writer and reader on a specific topic [2]. Let's take a look at a writing task excerpted from ETIC to see how the 5 elements are presented.

Task 1: You are Jones Cooper, secretary in the Customer Service Department of an international hotel. You are informed that construction work will begin near the hotel and may cause some noises. Write an email to all guests,

To let them know when the construction work will start and finish each day.

To let them know where the construction work will take place.

To apologize to them for any inconvenience caused.

Write about 50 words within 20 minutes.

A. Topic

Topic is the information and content that the writer communicate with the reader. Topic is the base and range where the writer makes written dialogue with the reader. In task one, the topic is the information about the construction work that cause some inconvenience, to which the writer may have familiar experience in real life. The topic determines the contents like reasons, facts and measures about the construction work that the writer wants the reader to be informed of.

B. Writer

In ETIC's communicative writing, the student writer is given a real role in each task. The role determines the tone, style, content and how the content will be presented. In task 1, students are asked to write an email in the role of a secretary in the Customer Service Department of an international hotel. Secretary works under the instruction of a manager and follows working commands from the manager. With this position, students are supposed to write in an objective tone with little comments on the facts. Therefore, students should work on contents about basic information about the construction, such as starting and ending time, location and the hotel's response to it. And in the end add some apologetic tone because the role as a secretary is communicating with the customers on behalf of the hotel for the inconveniences during their stay.

C. Reader

Communicative writing emphasizes the *interaction* between writers and readers and it involves creating a text that the writer assumes the reader will recognize and expect. As in many of the situations in real life, student writers are encouraged to think about who their readers are and what they need from a text. In the process of writing, writers bear the reader's role in mind, which help writers to organize their thoughts in ways readers can easily follow. Readers in task 1 are guests in a hotel where construction work will begin nearby and may cause some noises. What they care about is some message about the construction work during their stay and the hotel's response to it. With this reader-oriented consideration, students are supposed to create language as informative as possible and avoid those commentary expressions. Besides, they should try to write in a way that makes the guests feel the hotel staff care their happy and safe stay.

D. Language

Language is a set of "meaning-making resources" that are crucial to everyday communication and which enable speakers not only to convey information to each other but also to maintain social relationships in the sense of both transaction and interaction [11]. A primary function of language is for humans to convey information to each other or request services of some kind in a variety of situations (e.g., relating events that happen to them, giving someone directions, asking for services such as in a shopping or other service encounter). Different contexts require different kinds of vocabulary and different expressions that are suitable to that particular context. Such contexts can be classified according to "genres" such as narrative, recount, exposition, procedure, protocol, report, explanation, and interview [12]. Under the influence of traditional linguistics and rhetorics, students are instructed to use consistent, explicit, dramatic and vivid expressions. But it may not be necessarily true in communicative context, say, when we write a notice in which the language should be concise and clear. The genre in task 1 is like an announcement email, so the language tend to be direct, clear and polite.

E. Purpose

The purpose of writing in communicative writing is the effect, motivation and expectation that the article tends to achieve. It may be to spread information, to persuade, to appeal or to touch, etc. Different social purposes can affect language form and function. Purpose and function can be reflected in the genres that decides the language style. In task 1, the purpose of the email is to inform the guests of the possible noise caused by the construction and apologize for it, which determines the genre to be a notice style. This requires the writer to choose informative words for accurate message instead of descriptive ones so that effective communication between writer and reader can be achieved in this given context.

IV. IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

A majority of Chinese students lack interest and motivation in English writing, uncertain of why to write, what to write and how to write. These three problems constitute the core issue of English writing for Chinese students. The five elements in communicative writing may help to tackle these problems by establishing motivation, constructing effective contents and developing writing strategies. Here are some suggestions that can be used to teach communicative writing in Chinese college English class.

A. Creating communicative writing environment

Traditional writing approach is mainly a writing practice in which the teacher and students communicate through graded scores, underlined mistakes, suggested revision and teacher's final comments. Students feel pressure from teacher's merely academic feedback and the communication between them is not smooth and authentic. Communicative writing centers around the communication between writer and reader. What is most needed in writing class is the group of readers. Peers and teachers can be trained as readers to give real response to the student as a writer. The response can be made in form of peer

review and teacher review that focus on readers' idea about the content information they got from the writing and what they would suggest to improve or how they would like to further know or feel uncertain of so that the writer can revise according to the reader's response. Based on the response from the readers, the writer goes through several rounds of revision to make improvements on the content, the selection of words and misleading information caused by grammatical mistakes. This may not only improve the quality of the writing but also helps students to be motivated in the communicative writing activity.

B. Designing communicative writing tasks

To be competent and professional in writing, we should engage communicative writing tasks to help them be as practical as possible in their current or future life and employment. The writing tasks practiced in the classroom have to be taken from real life situations and environment, leaving aside abstract and non-authentic tasks that they may never face in their daily routine. Well designed communicative writing tasks can not only help practice and assess language proficiency but also keep students motivated in writing since they are likely to feel the significance of writing in a communicative way. To design communicative writing tasks, the five elements should be carefully considered and coordinated. Not only can we give them roles in real life like secretary, manager, editor, monitor, etc., but we can give them roles from the texts of course book. With previous knowledge on the texts, this could be more interesting but challenging for students and easy to manage for teachers. In this way, communicative writing can be done regularly each time the teaching of a unit is completed.

C. Using online platform to make writing more communicative

Online learning has become a mainstream in education today since it's advocated for its time and space convenience, massive information, fast interaction and learner centeredness, etc.. Online writing platforms like pigai.org and iWrite are the most popular and successful platforms with the vast majority of enrollments in China. The friendly design of the platform can make communication much easier between the writer,

reader and teacher if the teacher share students' writing so that peer students can communicate with the writer by leaving comments. The student writer can also leave message to the teacher to hear his or her comments either or both as an instructor and reader. Through this kind of online communication, students can gain more opportunities of communication to perfect their writing.

Communicative writing breaks the scoring standards of language accuracy in traditional writing approach. As is demonstrated in the writing tasks in ETIC, students feel engaged in communicative writing as they have readers to communicate with. Communicative writing may be the ice breaker for students' hesitance to write in today's writing class.

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