



Catering for the Specific Needs of Elementary Level Korean Learners in the Australian ELICOS Sector – A Case Study of a School in Sydney

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Abstract

Given the large numbers of Korean students in Australian ESL classrooms, many teachers have developed a broad knowledge of Korean culture and learning styles. However, the problem remains of how to incorporate this knowledge into everyday teaching practices in the multilingual classroom. This case study examines the tendency for many Korean learners in Australia to congregate in classes at pre-intermediate level and below due to inadequate speaking skills. Two successful advanced level Korean learners currently studying in Australia are interviewed in order to explore some of the underlying factors behind this phenomenon. Finally, some practical suggestions are offered to assist ESL teachers in dealing with some affective factors inside and outside the classroom which may be preventing Korean students from taking full advantage of living in an English speaking environment.

Keywords: *Korean learners, ELICOS, Australia, learning styles*

Introduction

English language teaching in Australia has been undergoing an expansion over the past few years, largely due to increasing numbers of international students enrolling in English Language Intensive Courses (ELICOS) at private colleges. Generally speaking, depending on the nationality mix at particular colleges, teachers typically face multi-lingual classes where students come from a wide variety of different cultural backgrounds. However, Korea is currently the number two source country after China for the ELICOS sector, with private

colleges providing 76% of courses for Koreans (Australian Government, 2007). This can mean that Korean students are over-represented in the nationality mix in some classes.

Newly arrived Korean students, despite typically scoring quite well on tests of discrete grammatical points, tend to congregate in elementary level classes due to low level competencies in productive skills. Even in ELICOS colleges which comprise quite a wide range of students from different parts of the world, the Korean students can often miss out on a real multicultural experience in the classroom when their classes are overwhelmingly composed of other Korean students. It is also important to remember that some culturally specific affective factors also impact quite significantly on Korean learners' ability to take full advantage of the benefits of living in an English speaking country. Many of them may need extra encouragement and assistance from their English teachers so that they can confidently take advantage of the extra opportunities for speaking English outside the classroom.

Korean culture is imbued with the Confucian tradition, which emphasizes the maintenance of social order and the strict structuring of human relationships within society. Within this philosophy, the teacher's role is to impart knowledge to her students, who do not question the teacher under any circumstances. Learners' motivation is not driven from within, but is externally directed by parents, peers and the examination system (Han, 2003). Such learning preferences do not fit well within the communicative language teaching (CLT) tradition, and teachers in Australia can sometimes face resistance when trying to employ these methods in the classroom. It is also easy to assume that all adult learners will automatically be able to take advantage of the opportunities to practise their English outside the classroom. However, as we shall see, this may not necessarily be true for many Korean learners.

At official levels, CLT has already gained quite wide acceptance in Korea, where it was officially incorporated into the Ministry of Education's 7th curriculum in 2001 (Yoon, 2005). Of course, CLT can be a catch-all phrase for quite a range of different methods in language teaching, and an analysis of this curriculum reveals that such techniques have only been applied in a very limited way at this stage (Yoon, 2005). Another important factor restricting the use of CLT in Korea is non-native speaker teachers' general lack of communicative competence in English (Dash, 2002). Therefore, despite recent attempts to place a higher emphasis on communicative competence, the Korean syllabus is still quite heavily weighted in favour of grammatical outcomes (Dash, 2002). Indeed, Li (2001) reports that the grammar translation and audiolingual methods are still quite widely used by Korean teachers.

The Korean language itself is also so completely different from English, that the Korean learner may have special difficulties in language acquisition that are not shared by learners from other backgrounds. For example, Korean is considered notoriously difficult to learn by English speakers, and the opposite applies for Korean learners of English (Dragut, 1998). The Confucian tradition also implies that a speaker should avoid the use of 'no' for the sake of living in harmony (Park, as cited in Dragut, 1998), a cross-cultural factor worthy of consideration by English teachers in Australia, especially at elementary levels where 'yes/no' question forms are usually taught. At the syntactic level, Koreans rely on the relative importance of information rather than grammatical function when constructing sentences (Dragut, 1998). Such differences obviously interfere with communicative competence in English, and a knowledge of these and cultural differences may assist the Australian teacher when teaching Koreans.

Another important phenomenon in the Korean education system which is bound to impact on students' learning strategies is the overwhelming focus on teaching for exams. Students are groomed throughout their schooling to do well in the 'College Scholastic Ability Test' (CSAT), which determines university entrance. This leads Korean parents to spend large amounts of money on extra tutoring, including English 'cram' schools, where it is common to study past midnight. However, many of these schools are badly managed, claiming to focus on learning conversation whilst in fact teaching the rote memorisation essential for test preparation (Card, 2005). Nevertheless, Korean students tend to score quite low on an international scale on the 'Test of English for International Competence' (TOEIC). According to Card (2005), this is hardly surprising given the amount of corruption and malfeasance in the Korean EFL industry.

Method

A case study approach was used in order to investigate the specific characteristics of Korean learners in the Australian context. This approach was selected in order to provide a basis for a subsequent action research project seeking to address the problems experienced by Korean learners in developing their speaking skills.

According to Nunan (1992) the case study is generally concerned with the specific features of an individual entity such as a class or a school. Hence, it is ideally suited to the in-depth investigation of a particular group, which may provide fertile ground to make further

generalisations to the broader population of which the group is a member (Cohen & Manion, 1985, as cited in Nunan, 1992). The case study methodology is also particularly suited to the individual teacher, since it is easily accessible and its findings can be put to practical use in the classroom. Nunan (1992) also refers to the centrality of context in case studies, and this is a key reason why the method has been selected in this instance, since the context described is broadly reflected throughout most of the ELICOS sector in Australia. The case study also provides an ideal means for the individual practitioner to explore their own workplace, thereby lessening the importance of external validity (Nunan, 1992).

This study was inspired by the fact that in my own teaching experience over several years in the sector, Korean students tended to be over-represented at lower levels, and also to stay at those levels longer than students from other countries. Also, as a result of this phenomenon, many teachers had felt pressured by Koreans to put them up to higher levels without the requisite communicative competency. This in turn created problems for pre-intermediate and intermediate level teachers, who often had to deal with classes which included Koreans with inadequate speaking skills who were unable to participate fully in communicative activities.

Design

Standard level test results of an elementary class including a brief five-minute speaking test were analysed. There were 12 students in the class, six of whom came from Korea. The level tests were conducted every five weeks in order to assess whether or not students were ready to advance to the next level.

Of the six Korean students who took the formal test, all scored 90% or more on the grammar component. The reading section represented the second strongest area for the group of Koreans. Two older female Koreans scored extremely well in the speaking test, but they were in quite a unique position compared with the rest of the Korean group. They were both about 40 years old and were living together with their eight-year-old sons who were enrolled for a year in an Australian primary school. Since their sons were learning English at the same time, they had a policy of speaking as much English as possible after school hours. The other Koreans in the class were much more typical of the average Korean at the school. They ranged in age from 21 to 28 and all were sharing accommodation in Sydney with other Koreans. When asked about when they spoke English outside the classroom, all claimed they hardly ever used it.

The students all did a short modified IELTS parts one and two speaking test. The speaking marks of the four younger Koreans ranged from 62% to 65%, reflecting a more typical profile for elementary level Korean learners at the school. Surprisingly, their weakest point was in grammar and vocabulary, demonstrating that their grammatical and vocabulary knowledge was not easily available to them for communicative purposes.

In addition to this, separate interviews were recorded with two higher level Koreans who were studying at the school. The interviews were semi-structured, and ranged in length from an hour to an hour and a half. Questions were designed to elicit specific cultural characteristics of Korean learners, as well as information on aspects of the Korean education system and lifestyles of Korean students in Sydney.

Participants

The two female interviewees were selected because they represented successful Korean learners who were studying at the college. One of them, 'Sunny', is a 33-year-old journalist who studied English literature at university in Korea. She has since graduated at advanced level from the college after completing a 10-week IELTS course. The other one, 'Eve', is a 25-year-old advanced level student who is an English teacher in a private English college in Korea, in effect a conversation cram school. She has a degree in English literature and education from a Korean university and was studying in Australia in order to improve her speaking skills. It was the second visit to Australia for both of them.

Eve taught alongside untrained native speaker teachers at the cram school in Korea, and only ever taught grammar and vocabulary since the native speakers were always assigned the conversation classes. She currently rates her speaking skills as superior to most Korean teachers of English in the state school system. However, when asked to assess her own strengths and weaknesses in English, she claimed grammar and listening to be her strengths, and felt least confident about her speaking skills.

Sunny comes from a small town in Korea, and excelled at English and Korean at high school. After commencing university, she obtained a scholarship to study English. She has travelled overseas before and enjoys learning about other cultures. Sunny doesn't really consider herself to be a typical Korean learner, in that she likes to improve her English through reading English novels and newspapers. According to her, most Korean learners do not tend to

focus on reading in English. She is able to support herself whilst studying in Australia by working as a freelance journalist for Korean newspapers.

Generally speaking, most Korean students stay at the school for quite extended periods, most enrolling for between 9 to 12 months. During this time, they usually study General English for 22.5 hours per week, with a small percentage opting for IELTS or Cambridge First Certificate classes if they make it to intermediate or upper-intermediate levels. The typical Korean student is female and in their early to mid-twenties, often in the middle of a university degree in Korea. A small minority elect to stay long term in a 'homestay' situation with an Australian family. However, the overwhelming majority of Korean students at the school end up sharing an apartment in the centre of Sydney with other Koreans, just a few blocks walk away from the college.

Interviews with Korean learners

'Sunny' and 'Eve' both made similar comments about their experiences in learning English in Korea. Sunny had achieved top marks for English when graduating from her high school, but could not speak at all until she went to university and had conversation classes with a Canadian native speaker. They both commented that their high school teachers hardly used English in class, and in fact may not have been able to speak much English at all. They also both confirmed that in order to enter university in Korea, students must pass an English entrance exam, no matter what degree they intend to take.

Sunny talked about the intense pressure within the Korean education system, with students competing to gain entrance to the top, most prestigious universities. She also mentioned the social problems that this causes, with youth suicide in the age group 15 to 18 years having become an issue over the past 10 years. This is backed up by the Korean National Statistical Office, which calculated that more than 1000 students committed suicide between 2000 and 2003 (Card, 2005).

Eve corroborated this point of view, outlining the long hours that most Koreans are forced to spend studying in their high school years in particular. She went to a boarding school during high school, and in her final year classes ran from 6am to 5pm. After that, students were forced to undergo supervised self-study between 5pm and 10pm. Apparently, some private English colleges cater for such demanding school schedules by running English classes from 11 p.m. onwards in the evenings. Eve also made the comment that considering the stress levels that

university students also suffer, most Koreans studying English in Australia viewed it as a welcome year off from the pressures back home. She claimed that many would go straight from university to work after this, and their year in Australia would be most Koreans' only opportunity to enjoy some levels of freedom.

Sunny and Eve are both atypical of most Korean students at the college, in that they have achieved high levels of oral proficiency in English. Both are quite confident and outgoing and eager to explore the opportunities that Sydney offers to get to know people from all over the world and to practise their English. They both agreed that they don't see themselves as being typical of most Koreans in this regard. Eve made the point that on her first visit to Australia, living in a homestay environment was more important for improving her English skills than formal study. Both of them highlighted the general Korean uneasiness with making mistakes in speaking, and propensity to avoid speaking altogether, especially with European students. They confirmed a general Korean impression that European students have superior speaking skills. However, this also reflected an ambivalence amongst Korean learners at the school, since Sunny thought that many of them chose this college because their agents had informed them it attracted higher levels of Europeans than other Sydney colleges.

Sunny had made a point of going on as many school excursions on weekends as she could, because she wanted to exploit the opportunity to make friends with students from other countries. However, she discovered that hardly any Korean students took advantage of these activities, commenting that they probably were not as adventurous as her and needed more encouragement to participate.

Eve claimed that Koreans often criticised each other for 'showing off' by speaking English to other Koreans or non-Koreans, especially those still at lower levels of proficiency. In her opinion, many Koreans felt that they should find out more about Australian culture before trying to communicate with native speakers, and that quite a few Korean students might not be highly motivated to improve their speaking skills at all. This is due to several factors, including the fact that the education system in Korea does not specifically test speaking skills. Also, many might simply need to enjoy their brief year of freedom in Australia before returning to the stresses of work and study in Korea.

Implications for teaching

Both interviewees' comments clearly point to differences in learning styles as being a major contributor to Korean learners' general lack of communicative competence in English. Although the vast majority would not have been exposed to CLT approaches before coming to Australia, it would seem that many were already aware of these, and had in fact chosen the school because of the range of different nationalities. Also, due to their respect for teachers, and their cultural tendency towards obedience in class, the use of CLT generally meets with cooperation from Korean students, although it sometimes takes a period of a few weeks before they begin to participate fully in communication activities. Given these factors, at least some of their difficulties in attaining competence in speaking would seem to stem from affective factors outside the classroom.

According to Brown (1994) a learner's self-identity and world view can be challenged by the move from one culture to another, often leading to culture shock. Eve's comment about the Korean need to get to know Australian culture better before attempting to converse with native speakers confirms this fear. However, given many Korean students' tendencies to ghettoise within their own communities whilst living in Sydney, many may never go beyond the 'second stage' of such culture shock, instead seeking escape from the intrusion of cultural differences into their new lifestyles (Brown, 1994). Schumann's hypothesis (as cited in Brown, 1994) reinforces this view by stating that learners who come from more socially distant cultures have proportionately greater difficulty in learning a second language. This would coincide with some previous points about the conservatism of the Confucian culture in Korean society. The 'optimal distance model' of second language acquisition states that real fluency only occurs at the third stage of acculturation (Brown, 1994), implying that many Korean learners' lack of achievement in speaking skills may not be overcome until they more fully embrace aspects of Australian culture.

Brown (1994) also comments on the detrimental effects of inhibition and the tendency of some learners to view making mistakes as a threat to their egos, pointing to the importance of risk-taking as a counterbalance to these affective factors. In the case of Korean learners, these threats could be sidestepped through the use of risk avoidance strategies such as living with other Koreans, and not going out much to explore the new environment or interact with other nationalities.

Another factor which may hinder the development of speaking skills could be related to the focus on semantic meaning within the Korean education system. According to Ellis (2005),

there is an important distinction between the teaching processes required to develop semantic and pragmatic meaning. The former defines language as an object and can therefore focus on discrete items such as grammatical structure and purpose, whereas pragmatic meaning is tied to actual language use in real situations and how it functions as a means of genuine communication. The negotiation of pragmatic meaning in a real communicative situation is where real language acquisition actually occurs. Ellis (2005) sees the creation of opportunities to foster the development of this aspect of meaning as one of the most important focuses in the language classroom. Whilst the focus on explicit knowledge such as grammar is definitely important, this knowledge needs to be put into practice in order for it to be converted into the implicit knowledge so vital for fluent communication.

In the case of Korean learners, much of their previous language learning has focused on the development of explicit knowledge such as grammar and vocabulary, precisely the type of knowledge that must be mastered in order to do well in tests such as the TOEIC. When they arrive in Australia, they are usually ill equipped in terms of pragmatic competence, and this is reflected in their poor speaking skills. In Australia, the onus is thus placed on the teacher to provide as many opportunities as possible for genuinely communicative activities inside the classroom, since, as this study has shown, some Korean students may not be accessing much English outside.

Another important factor in language acquisition is exposure to the target language, something which Krashen (1994, cited in Ellis, 2005) has argued at some length. His theory of 'comprehensible input' emphasises the significance of providing a level of input in the target language which has been modified by the instructor to an appropriate degree i.e. a level which learners can understand but also challenges them to acquire new language. Since many elementary level Koreans may not be exposing themselves to much English outside the classroom, Australian teachers need to keep this in mind. Accordingly, they should encourage Korean students to take advantage of the English-speaking environment with such activities as going to the movies, extensive reading programmes, and organising class excursions where learners are forced to interact with English speakers.

The nature of the multilingual classroom in the Australian ELICOS sector also requires teachers to recognise individual and cultural differences in learning styles. This requires a 'flexible teaching approach' (Ellis, 2005) which can cater for these different styles, as well as providing explicit learner training which highlights various learning strategies. According to

Lee and Oxford (2008), many Korean learners are not explicitly aware of how developing learning strategies can assist them in improving their English. However, Chamot (1998, cited in Lee & Oxford, 2008) claims that the development of this very awareness is crucial in language learning, and that successful language learners generally consciously employ learning strategies. Given the unique opportunities that living in an English speaking environment can provide for language acquisition, teachers need to actively encourage Korean learners to focus on new learning strategies that may not have been immediately available to them back home. For example, some of the memorisation strategies that may have been used effectively in Korea to pass exams like the TOEIC must now be superseded by other strategies. Korean learners in Australia must learn to recognise that it is necessary to take risks in order to learn another language and their teachers can encourage this type of behaviour by reinforcing a positive self-image in the classroom. Also, the use of learner diaries where students record all the instances of exposure to English outside the classroom can be a useful means of focusing learners on taking responsibility for their own learning. These diaries can include such events as conversations, functional exchanges, reading the newspaper and even watching television.

The Australian ELICOS teacher thus faces quite a few challenges in helping to acclimatise Korean students to their new environment. As previously stated, the classroom environment and teaching approaches may be quite readily accepted by Koreans after a relatively short period of study, but cultural factors outside the classroom may impact on their ability to acquire overall competence in English. In order to help them come to terms with their new environment, it is important that teachers find out about their students' lifestyles in Australia. Do they live with other Koreans? How far from the school do they live? What do they do in their spare time? How do they study in their own time? How often do they use English outside the classroom?

When asking such questions, the teacher should encourage them to make any necessary changes, such as advertising in the newspaper for non-Koreans to share their apartment. Many Koreans are unaware at the outset of the importance of becoming independent in their learning, as their education system tends to encourage dependence on the teacher. Australian teachers should not assume that, as adults, Korean students will necessarily be aware of what other students may take for granted in this regard. And above all, teachers need to offer lots of encouragement and reassurance to Korean students that making mistakes is a necessary part of the learning process and that they will not be judged harshly in this regard. Class

communication activities should emphasise practical transactional routines to begin with, such as asking directions, buying a train ticket, or ordering in a restaurant. These should be followed up with the directive to perform these conversational rituals outside the classroom for 'homework', as many Koreans will be more likely to do so if explicitly told to by a teacher.

Conclusions

Given the increasing numbers of Korean students entering the ELICOS sector in Australia, teachers need to be more aware of their learning styles and of their living situations. They also need to acknowledge the fact that many low level Korean learners may hardly be using English at all outside the classroom. On the plus side, the high status of the teacher in the Korean Confucian tradition may mean that explicit teacher intervention in this area could be quite effective.

However, although teachers represent a pivotal connection between Korean learners and Australian culture, it is not only the job of teachers to make their stay in Australia more worthwhile. There needs to be more effort also from school administrators through their agents to encourage Koreans to live in a homestay for a while on arrival. Individual schools could probably also do more to organise weekend excursions involving more Koreans so that they can overcome their fear of conversing with students from other countries. The ELICOS sector in Australia currently needs to be able to better accommodate the specific needs of large numbers of Korean learners.

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Building Formal Schemata with ESL Student Writers: Linking Schema Theory to Contrastive Rhetoric

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Abstract

Much research has been done on content and formal schemata in reading with students of English as a Second Language (ESL), but the research into formal schemata in ESL writing is a more recent area of study. The concept of “formal schemata” has been neglected in the field of second language writing. By examining related theories and empirical studies, this reflective inquiry attempts to introduce schema theory to contrastive rhetoric research, which focuses on the ESL writers’ problems with rhetorical form and tries to explain this in reference to their first languages. Under the theoretical framework of constructivism, this paper draws insights from schema theory, reading research, reading-writing connections, current-traditional rhetoric, and contrastive rhetoric. A model of ESL writing emphasizing the interrelationship among context, cognition, and rhetorical form and a notion of “building formal schemata with ESL student writers” are proposed and the theoretical and pedagogical implications are discussed. To illustrate the proposed writing mode, a sample instructional unit plan based on such a model is presented to show how the model links schema theory to contrastive rhetoric via an Asian student orientation.

Key words: *Constructivism; formal schemata; ESL writing; contrastive rhetoric; rhetorical form.*

1. Introduction

Much research has been done on content and formal schemata in reading with students of English as a Second Language (ESL). It has been found that when content and form are familiar, ESL readers are able to comprehend and memorize a text better; in contrast, unfamiliar content and form can cause trouble for the readers and affect reading speed and effectiveness (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Meyer, 1982; Carrell, 1981). Furthermore, content

and formal knowledge may help the readers predict the organization and purpose of a text (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Meyer, 1982).

In her review of Meyer's ESL reading research, Carrell (1987) suggested a positive connection between teaching textual structure and effective writing, that is: shared formal schemata were helpful for the reader and the writer to negotiate meaning of the text. The research into formal schemata in ESL writing, however, is still in its infancy and the concept of "formal schemata" has been neglected in the field of second language writing.

1.1 Problem

Many of the problems ESL writers encounter can be related to the form of English writing and the interference of the form of their first languages (see Flowerdew, 1999; Silva, 1997). Contrastive rhetoric research focuses on the problems of the ESL writers and tries to explain them in reference to their first languages (Connor, 1996). Schema theory has been dealing with content and rhetorical form in reading; and genre analysis research focuses on rhetorical features of different writing tasks and contexts. However, though contrastive rhetoric researchers are paying increasing attention to genre analysis (Connor, 1996), there has not been much effort in relating schema theory to contrastive rhetoric research. There are very few empirical studies applying schema theory to examine ESL writers' problems with rhetorical form, and a notion of "building formal schemata with ESL writers" is yet to be introduced to contrastive rhetoric and second language writing research.

1.2 Purpose

This paper aims to propose a model of ESL writing taking into account not only rhetorical form but also the context and the cognitive aspect of ESL writing as well as the interaction among the three. Based on such a model, the paper proposes a notion "building formal schemata with ESL student writers" and argues that this notion plays an important role in ESL writing research and pedagogy because it brings together context, cognition, and rhetorical form.

1.3 Research Questions

The practice of teaching rhetorical form has been pervasive in both first language (L1) and second language (L2) composition classes despite the fact that the product approach has been

criticized by researchers and described as a prescribed and linear approach. Is there any practical reason behind the teachers' zest in teaching rhetorical form? In ESL reading research, it has been found that background knowledge of content and form enhances reading performance. Moreover, in ESL writing, the learners seem to have more problems with how to write (e.g. grammar, genre, organization) than with what to write (i.e. the content area). Can the concept of formal schemata be used to interpret and attack those problems? Contrastive rhetoric, as its name indicates, initially compares rhetorical forms across languages. Can the concept of formal schemata be introduced to contrastive rhetoric research? Contrastive rhetoric research is now expanding its investigation areas to context and cognition. Are context and cognition related to the concept of formal schemata?

Therefore, the following questions are applied to guide this paper: Are formal schemata related to ESL writers' problems in ESL writing? Why do we focus on the form in writing? Are context, cognition, and rhetorical form related to and interact with one another? Are formal schemata applicable to contrastive rhetoric? What are the theoretical and pedagogical implications of formal schemata in ESL writing?

1.4 Significance

The introduction of schema theory into reading research was a notable advance. Contrastive rhetoric research has been dealing with ESL writers' problem with form for years. If "formal schemata" can link schema theory with contrastive rhetoric, it will expand the knowledge base and clarify the focus of contrastive rhetoric research. More importantly, a notion of "building formal schemata" will have much pedagogical potential in ESL writing instruction as demonstrated through the discussions in the later part of this paper on pedagogical implications and on an instructional unit.

1.5 Definitions of Terms

Some key terms are defined as follows for this paper:

- **Constructivism:** An epistemology that views knowledge as constructed and learning as an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their previous knowledge (Bruner, 1966)

- **Schema:** a mental framework for understanding and remembering information of the world (Bartlett, 1932); an organization of concepts and actions that can be revised by new information. (Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, 1998).
- **Form:** conventional patterns of rhetorical and textual organization of written language, e.g., rhetorical conventions, genre, and textual structure.
- **Content schemata:** schematic background knowledge of topic.
- **Formal schemata:** schematic background knowledge of organizational patterns and rhetorical conventions of written texts.

2. Theoretical Framework:

In the following section of the paper, I begin with reviewing constructivism as the theoretical framework of schema theory and three prominent constructivist learning theories. I then discuss schema theory and its application in ESL reading research. After that, I address reading-writing connections. It follows that the shared knowledge and process of reading and writing suggest that schema theory may also be applied in ESL writing research. After my justification of teaching form in ESL writing, I argue that the current-traditional rhetoric should be criticized not because it is wrong, but because it is insufficient and misleading. I maintain that a rhetorical pattern is conventional response to a recurrent context of writing. As a result, it is relatively stable and hence teachable. For individual writers, rhetorical conventions are acquired from the discourse community, that is the social context of writing, and stored in memory; while contextual response to a specific writing task relies on cognitive strategies of individual writers. Both memory and strategy have to do with cognition that comes into play with the social and specific contexts of writing. Therefore, the teaching of rhetorical form needs to consider the interaction among context, cognition and form, which provides a scaffold or starting point for novice writers.

On the above theoretical ground, I then propose a notion of formal schemata construction in ESL writing and contend that it could be an alternative to the current-traditional rhetoric due to its constructivist, contextual, and modifiable nature with both cognition and context taken into account. Contrastive rhetoric research studies form and culture. It would be enriched by cognitive and social-cultural perspectives, including a notion of “building formal schemata in writing”. That is how I will link schema theory to contrastive rhetoric. After that, I review some empirical studies on formal schemata in ESL writing, with a focus on form and

cognition, to illustrate that formal schemata reveal the connections between form and cognition. Finally I call for future reflections and studies on “building formal schemata in writing” by exploring the interrelationship among context, cognition and rhetorical form.

2.1 Constructivism

Constructivist epistemology and learning theories focus on the roles of the individual’s construction of meaning, prior knowledge and experiences as well as social context in the learning process. Constructivism (see definition) is closely related to schema theory and writing research. It is the theoretical framework of schema theory. Moreover, the paradigm of constructivism is applicable to writing research due to the meaning making, critical thinking, and epistemic nature of writing.

Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge and knowing. Constructivism as an epistemology dates back to the times of Socrates (470-399 B.C.), who asserted, “knowledge is only perception”. Socrates may not be absolutely right about that, but his remarks revealed the subjectivity involved in human beings’ (both collective and individual) exploration and understanding of the world. The 20th century saw the educational paradigm shift from positivism (knowledge is transferred from the teacher to the students) to constructivism (knowledge is constructed by the students themselves through their individual interactions with the learning environment). If scholarly endeavors can be viewed as human beings’ collective pursuit of knowledge, then professional literature is the result of the temporary (because this is an on-going process) consensus of the researchers in a field. A discourse community constructs the content and topics of inquiries within the field, as well as the research methods and the ways of communication. For instance, in the field of Second Language Writing research, there have been much efforts in shaping common topics (e.g. Silva, 1990; 1993; 1997; Leki, 1991; See also Matsuda, 1997b; Kapper, 2002) and methods of inquiries (e.g. the Third Symposium on Second Language Writing), but the lack of a comprehensive Second Language Writing theory suggests that professionals in the field have not yet reached consensus on a theoretical ground for the field.

2.2 Constructivist Learning Theories

Learning theories embracing constructivist epistemology were represented by cognitive constructivism, social constructivism and transformative learning theory. Although Piaget

(1970) had not claimed himself a constructivist, his theory of cognitive development constituted the basis of lots of constructivist learning theories including social constructivism and transformative learning theory.

Piaget (1970) made the statement that “intelligence organizes the world by organizing itself”. In other words, in the first place, knowledge is the organized information of the world. Piaget’s theory of cognitive development maintained that knowledge could not be readily transmitted to a human mind. Rather, it had to be constructed by individuals through their own experiences which created mental patterns in their heads. Piaget (1970) further pointed out that as mental patterns underlying specific acts of intelligence, cognitive structures developed through assimilation and accommodation. When new information is identified by previous cognitive structures, it is incorporated into the structures; when new information is distinct from previous cognitive structures, it is either discarded or the cognitive structures will be modified to accommodate new information. Another constructivist researcher Bruner (1966) further argued that cognitive structure (i.e., schema, mental model) provided meaning and organization to experiences and allowed the individual to "go beyond the information given". Educational practice derived from cognitive constructivism featured learner-centered approach in instruction.

Lev Vygotsky (1981), a social constructivist psychologist, emphasized the social context of learning and claimed that learning is situated and can be best achieved through social interaction. Educational practice inspired by social constructivism includes contextual, collaborative learning and workshop-like classroom.

Recently, Mezirow (1995) proposed a transformative learning theory, which is rooted in constructivism and focusing on the transformative nature of learning. Mezirow (1995) described learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action". Because transformative learning theory emphasizes rational, cognitive processes related to critical reflection, it will be of great application potential in the field of composition studies in general and in L2 writing in particular.

2.3 Schema Theory

Bartlett (1932) was the first person to propose the concept of schema, although Piaget (1970) had referred to the similar concept as cognitive structure and mental model. Bartlett (1932)

advocated that human memory takes the form of schema that provides a mental framework for understanding and remembering information. Rumelhart (1980) further developed the schema concept and described schema theory as basically a theory of how knowledge is mentally represented in the mind and used. More recently, Anderson (1995) described “schema” as “an abstract knowledge structure that captures regularities of objects and events and should include all variation of the known cases in a flexible way”...and “the schema is generated by the repetition of the same occurrence in such a way that the brain will preserve the common features” (Anderson, 1995).

Based on above descriptions of schema, it can be inferred that schema has the following characteristics: it is organized - when we learn, information is classified into hierarchical categories; it is built on prior knowledge of the individual - the process of building schema is accumulative and individualized; it contains the salient features of the object or event - schema directs our attention to the most distinguishable aspects; it takes repeated encounters to build a schema - that is why practice is necessary; it is contextual - schema comes from various real contexts; and it is modifiable - schema can be modified to accommodate new information and contexts (For attributes of schema, see also Thorndyke & Yekovich, 1980).

According to Graesser (1981; see also Anderson, 1985), schema has mainly four kinds of functions. First, schema provides background knowledge to interpret a specific event. Second, schema provides background knowledge to infer beyond the information given. Third, schema generates predictions of events, actions, and information. Fourth, schema helps the individual identify regularities so that more attention can be allocated to accommodating new information.

In order to construct new schema, “cognitive hooks” need to be provided to hang new information (Hayes and Tierney, 1982). Measures for construction and activation of schema include analogies, conflicting information, advance organizers and relevant personal anecdotes. The bottom line is to build an association between old and new schemata.

2.4 Schema in ESL reading

In the field of TESOL, Carrell & Eisterhold (1983) divided schema into two categories: content schema and formal schema. They defined content schema as a reader's background or world knowledge of the topic, and formal schema as the background knowledge of organizational forms and rhetorical structures of written texts. Formal schema can include knowledge of

different text types and genres, and also includes the understanding that different types of texts have different ways of using text organization, language structures, vocabulary, grammar, level of formality/register.

Carrell & Eisterhold's (1983) studies found that familiar formal schema helped subjects enhance the quantity of recall in a story. When examining the combined effects of both content and formal schemata, Carrell & Eisterhold (1983) found that the more both content and form are familiar to the reader, the easier reading becomes. Based on these results, they suggested that ESL reading teachers should help students acquire appropriate content and formal schemata for better comprehension of text.

From a standpoint of text as interaction, Carrell (1987) reviewed the research on text analysis and reading, especially studies done by Meyer (1982), and suggested some implications for ESL composition. In Meyer's (1982) empirical reading research, as Carrell cited, it was found that the subjects' recalls of text content were enhanced significantly when they utilized the structure of the text to organize ideas. Meyer (1982) also found that readers were affected differently by different textual structures that served the different goals of a writer. Implications for ESL composition included that ESL writers should be taught about the top-level organizational structures of expository text, about the way to achieve specific communication goals, and about the way to use markers (such as 'because', 'therefore', 'likewise', 'however') to signal textual organization.

In the review of research on text analysis and reading, Carrell (1987) brought to our knowledge that reading and writing are interactive meaning making processes, in which the writer utilizes his/her formal schemata to anticipate those of the readers', while the readers' formal schemata help them make sense of the text content. In my view, this article is closely related to ESL students' academic writing, in which ESL writers seem to be lacking of appropriate formal schemata to meet the expectations of their readers of native speaker of English (NSE) and fail to accomplish specific communicative goals. For instance, an international graduate student may have difficulty fulfilling specific tasks in academic writing, e.g. citation and reference, Institutional Review Board proposal, project proposal and Master's thesis, etc., each of which can be further broken down into subtasks that demand more specific formal schemata. Therefore, as a remedy, the ESL students need to construct appropriate formal schemata in academic writing and one way to do it, as this article suggested, can be the learning of textual structure in ESL writing class.

2.5 Reading-writing Connections

The shared knowledge and process of reading and writing have been well documented. Kucer (1987) proposed four processing universals in reading and writing: readers and writers use their prior knowledge to construct text-world meaning; readers and writers share similar acts of schema location and activation, evaluation, and instantiation; readers and writers have a unified understanding of how written language operates, rather than separate sets of schemata, one for reading and the other for writing; and readers and writers possess common processing behavior patterns when generating meaning from texts. Johns (1986; 1997) also suggested that readers and writers share communicative purposes and knowledge of roles, context, formal text features, text content, register, cultural values and awareness of intertextuality. Furthermore, Johns (1997) maintained that literacy theories are evolving from traditional views (literacy as production of error-free sentences and texts) through learner-centered views (literacy as individual meaning making), to socioliterate views (literacy as socially constructed). And accordingly, the focus of literacy research moves from text through the learner to the social context.

Grabe's (2001a) summary of newer research development in reading and writing relations suggests that knowledge of form, e.g. textual structure and genre, plays important role in reading performance and is useful for writing as well: when reading to write, students can learn genre information for writing from model texts. When writing to read, students' practice with textual structure enhances reading performance. In the research on reading and writing instruction, there is a wealth of literature on summary writing, using model texts, graphic organizers, note taking and outlining (Grabe, 2001a, p. 26). Leki and Carson (1994, cited in Grabe, 2001a, p. 33) also point out that L2 learners need practice of various tasks combining reading and writing skills, guidance in deconstructing tasks and model texts, and understanding teacher expectations.

Because reading and writing are closely related to each other with shared knowledge and process (Reid, 1992a), as both the readers and the writers negotiate meaning out of the textual form in light of individual prior experience and the context, it is logical to infer that research in reading and research in writing may share some insights and methods. That is to say, since schema theory has been introduced to reading research successfully, it may also be applicable to writing research. In fact, content schema has found its place in writing research and

instruction. Students are provided the opportunity to read and discuss background materials of writing prompts to activate their content schemata to facilitate writing. However, there is not much research on formal schema in writing although much research has been dedicated to form related issues in writing.

2.5 Why Teach Form in ESL Writing

First, from the standpoint of rhetoric and communication, form (e.g. rhetorical conventions, genre, textual structure, perception of coherence, and even grammar) is socially constructed during the written communication process among the members in a society. A language per se is just an artificial symbolic system representing reality. That is to say, words, sentences, grammar, and textual structure are all shaped on the basis of the consensus of the people who use the language. Therefore, different cultures develop different languages and rhetorical conventions over time. Moreover, in a discourse community, there are genres for different communication tasks. Because form is specifically embedded in a given society or discourse community, it is problematic for new comers to the discourse community.

Second, on the other hand, form is relatively stable (although not absolutely static), predictable and teachable. Since form is constructed by the discourse community over time, it will not change overnight, though it allows variations across individuals. Rhetorical knowledge may turn the seeming chaos of L2 literacy into controllable patterns for ESL learners.

Third, from the view of rhetoric and cognition, the form of textual structure serves as advanced organizer for ESL learners. For example, ESL students are told that there is a theme in an expository essay, and a topic sentence in each paragraph, that the whole essay consists of introduction, body, and conclusion. Though they do not necessarily apply to all expository essays, organizational hints like these help the novice writers make sense of the essays in a sea of words and help them put their own ideas in order when composing essays.

Finally, from the view of rhetoric and culture, many problems that ESL student writers encounter can be related to form (e.g. Silva, 1997; Flowerdew, 1999; 2002). Forms differ across cultures due to the different social contexts and cognitions of peoples. For instance, essays written by many Asian people in their L1 are reader-responsible, and the underlying cognitive style is inductive. The writers express their ideas in an implicit way, assuming the readers have enough background knowledge for accurate comprehension. In contrast, essays written by westerners are writer-responsible, and the underlying cognitive style is deductive.

The western writers express their ideas explicitly and provide details to illustrate their points. That is to say, the difference of textual form is the result of different cultures and their underlying cognitions.

2.6 Current-traditional Rhetoric and Its Criticism

As an instructional approach for native-speakers of English composition, the current-traditional rhetoric directs students' attention to form and is also known as the "product approach". As Silva (1990) observes, the current-traditional rhetoric deals with elements in a paragraph, i.e. topic sentence, support sentence, concluding sentence and transitions, various paragraph developments (e.g. illustration, exemplification, comparison, contrast, causal analysis), organizational entities (introduction, body, and conclusion), and organizational patterns (narration, exposition, and argumentation). The current-traditional rhetoric is also enriched by the recent attempts of Foley, Rose, Haswell to identify teachable organizational patterns as conventional response to tasks (see Robinson, 1994).

The current-traditional rhetoric has been applied in ESL writing too and is criticized of its "linear and prescriptive nature" (Silva, 1990; see also Leki, 1991). As Silva (1990) points out, the current-traditional rhetoric has turned writing into a skill of arrangement, of "fitting sentences and paragraphs into prescribed patterns". Writing theories have evolved from product through process to post-process. Each of the theories has both limitations and values in terms of revealing the nature of writing. On the other hand, however, perhaps we need not discard the product approach completely simply because of its limitations. Teaching form in ESL writing may not be totally wrong, but just inadequate. Product approach is not necessarily exclusive of process approach. Nor does the product approach have to be prescriptive and de-contextualized. The students may still need to be explicitly taught and actively practice the knowledge of rhetorical form in writing. The question is why we still need it and how to teach it. My answer is that we need a writing pedagogy addressing the product, process and context of writing at the same time.

2.7 Contrastive Rhetoric Research and Its Concern of Form

Contrastive rhetoric research was proposed by Kaplan (1966), who investigated the relations between rhetoric and culture. It initially focused on the rhetorical problems of the ESL student writers and tried to explain the problems in reference to the students' first languages and

cultures (Connor, 1996). Contrastive rhetoric research is influenced by such theories as applied linguistics, linguistic relativity, rhetoric, text linguistics, discourse types and genres, literacy, and translation (Connor, 1996). A common target of inquiry in those theories is the forms of languages and what contributes to the features of the forms. For instance, genre analysis views research articles, presentations, proposals as different genres and argues that the essential difference lie in their communicative purposes, which are recognized by the professionals in a discourse community and impact the schematic structures of academic genres (Connor, 1996; Swales, 1990; Golebiowski, 1999).

Connor (1996) suggests that contrastive rhetoric needs to expand its research horizon from pure linguistic analysis of textual structure to incorporating cognitive and social-cultural variables of writing. The awareness of the social construction of meaning in composition has generated research on situations and tasks in cross-cultural writing. Reviewing previous research in contrastive rhetoric, Matsuda (1997a) identifies a static theory of L2 writing and argues that it is limited because it views the L2 writers' previous linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds as the only elements that shape the L2 textual organization. In contrast, Matsuda (1997a) proposes a dynamic model of L2 writing, in which both the L2 writers' and the L1 readers' previous backgrounds (which are complex and flexible) and the shared discourse community (which is local, historical, and interactive) affect the L2 textual organization. Moreover, the interrelationship among these elements is bi-directional (Matsuda, 1997a). Rhetorical form needs to be examined not only in context but also on account of cognitive factors. From the point of view of cognition in L1 writing, Flower and Hayes (1981) put forward a cognitive process model of writing that consists of four interactive components: task, environment, the writer's long-term memory, and the composing process. In this model, composing is identified as a "problem-solving activity responding to a rhetorical situation in the form of a text" (Flower and Hayes, 1981, cited in Connor, 1996). Moreover, Leki (1992) points out that rhetorical logic is also socially constructed. That is to say, cognition of rhetoric is essentially contextual

2.8 Context, Cognition, and Text - Formal Schemata Construction

Based on above discussion, I would like to propose a model of writing comprising three components that are local, historical, and interactive. They are context, cognition, and text. The context of writing includes such elements as the reader, the writer, their roles in the context, the

purpose of the act of writing, the writing task, and the shared discourse community. The cognition component refers to the reader's and the writer's memory (schemata), the writer's strategies of analyzing the context, and the writer's strategies of responding to the context. The text is the product of the writer's response to the context of writing. When composing the text, the writer needs to consider appropriate content and form. Rhetorical conventions are conventional response to contexts of writing. Therefore the teaching of rhetorical form needs to consider the interaction among context, cognition, and form.

Within the framework of constructivism, the perception of formal schemata construction in ESL writing emphasizes reading and writing connections, rhetoric and cognition relations, and social dimensions of rhetoric, literacy, and learning. Formal schemata construction may be an alternative for current traditional- rhetoric and may enrich contrastive rhetoric research, because it does not focus on textual form solely; instead, it also takes into account the factors of cognition and context in ESL writing. First, the idea of formal schemata construction reveals the important role that knowledge of rhetorical form plays in ESL writing. ESL students have not as many problems in what to write as in how to write. That is to say, ESL students have wonderful ideas; but the problem is how to present their ideas in English writing in a way that is accepted by the intended audience. When it comes to academic writing, this is also true with first language (L1) student writers, that is why genre analysis investigates rhetorical conventions in L1. Second, formal schemata refer to the cognitive aspect of learning. They are constructed in the mind of each individual, so they are modifiable to accommodate new information, rather than transmitted or prescribed, as opposed to current traditional- rhetoric. Third, formal schemata are socially constructed hence contextual, associated with specific writing tasks, situations, and discourse communities.

2.9 Relevant Empirical Studies on Formal Schemata in ESL Writing

There are very few empirical studies on formal schemata in ESL writing. For one thing, maybe because cognition is not yet a well developed area of inquiry in ESL writing. There has not been a close connection between schema theory and ESL writing research. For another, the notion of formal schemata construction is yet to be applied to ESL writing research. Previous relevant studies use other similar terms to refer to formal schemata, such as knowledge of rhetorical structures, which differs from knowledge of formal schemata due to its exclusion of cognition and context.

Below is a review of two representative empirical studies exploring textual form and cognition in ESL writing. These two studies substantiate the need of proposing the notion of formal schemata construction in ESL writing, because it makes more sense when we look through similar studies with such a notion in mind.

Using the approach of contrastive rhetoric, Hinds (1990) illustrated the differences of rhetorical structures between English and East Asian Languages. By examining Asian students' samples of ESL writing, Hinds (1990) noted that most of them could be classified as inductive writing, in which the thesis statement appeared at the end. On the other hand, Hinds (1990) argued, most of the English-speaking readers, favor deductive writing, in which the thesis statement appeared at the beginning. He also maintained that due to the difference of inductive and deductive preference, Western readers might not understand competent writing of speakers of Asian languages appropriately. This study is an example connecting textual structure to cognition.

Drawing upon recent research on writing-reading connection, Reid (1996) suggested that ineffective ESL writing may partly due to the ESL writer's contextual and rhetorical schemata that differ from those of native English speaker (NES). Reid (1996) conducted a study examining how well NES and ESL student readers and writers could predict and produce appropriate second sentences that followed the topic sentence in a paragraph of academic American English. Findings showed that by using their schemata, NESs were able to predict the second sentences twice as often as ESL writers, although inexperienced NES writers occasionally also produced inappropriate second sentences. Probably schemata help build a bridge between form and contexts, because formal schemata are constructed in specific contexts.

2.10 Summary

The arguments I have been making are as follows: knowledge is constructed, rather than transmitted. That is to say, when we learn, information is categorized on the basis of prior knowledge and experience. Moreover, schemata that organize those categories are generated from contextual knowledge and experience.

Schema theory derived from constructivist theories and epistemology. The application of schema theory in reading research reveals that content and formal schemata improve ESL reading competence. Furthermore, reading-writing connections suggest the possibility of

introducing schema theory, especially the term of formal schemata, into ESL writing research. Rhetorical form has been a central concern of both L1 and L2 writing pedagogy. As a result, I try to explore the rationale for teaching textual organization from rhetorical perspectives in light of communication, pedagogy, cognition, and culture. Current-traditional rhetoric has been criticized for its linear and prescriptive characteristics. I argue that current-traditional rhetoric is limiting due to its failure of considering the factors of cognition and context in writing activities.

Contrastive rhetoric research has been focusing on relations between form and culture. Its future development needs to address the cognitive and social aspects of rhetoric. In light of research in contrastive rhetoric and cognitive rhetoric, I propose a model of writing consisting of three key components, namely, context, cognition, and text, all of which are local, historical, and interactive. The notion of formal schemata construction embraces the above model on account of context, cognition, and textual organization. Consequently, we should build contextual formal schemata with ESL student writers in a meaningful way (with real tasks, audience and purpose) so that the students can better understand the interactions among context, cognition, and textual form.

2.11 Pedagogical implications: How to build formal schemata with ESL student writers?

Bruner (1966) points out “good methods for structuring knowledge should result in simplifying, generating new propositions, and increasing the manipulation of information.” Patterns and routines are simplified version of model texts. Highlighting the characteristics of rhetorical forms in various contexts, formal schemata may bring writing activity under control for novice ESL writers.

Some general instructional guidelines can be: Model text deconstruction (tasks, purpose, reader, components and elements of texts) and practice; cognitive process demonstration and practice; and guidelines for practice: contextualizing writing with authentic tasks - real audience and purposes to foster meaningful formal schemata construction and activation, and dynamic interactions among writer, text, reader, and context.

To illustrate my writing model emphasizing the interrelationship among context, cognition, and text, here is a sample instructional unit plan based on such a model, which shows how the model links schema theory to contrastive rhetoric via an Asian student orientation.

3. An Instructional Unit Plan

3.1 Background Information

A. Target student population

This unit is designed for undergraduate ESL students from Asia with relatively low academic reading and writing proficiency on the basis of their performance on the placement test. There are 12 students in the class, 7 men and 5 women. The students originally come from different Asian countries: four Chinese, two Japanese, two Vietnamese, two Indians, and two Iranians. They major in various disciplines, such as business, music, French, computer, medicine, and math. Three students are in their 40s. Five students are about 18-20 years old. Four are in their 20s. All of the students possess at least a high school diploma. The three middle-age students even have a B.A. degree from their home country. Everyone in the class needs to improve their academic reading and writing skills so that they can survive various assignments at the university; furthermore, they can move on to a higher level ESL class and eventually be able to take Freshmen English.

B. The classroom

Because this is an ESL academic reading and writing class and lots of writing needs to be done in class, the classroom is a computer lab with enough wired computers for each student. In addition, the classroom is equipped with a whiteboard, an overhead projector, a document projector and a screen. There is a long table in the middle of the classroom. The computers are sitting along the wall.

C. Prerequisite

Generally speaking, the students should have already been able to write at the sentence level and paragraph level. With a dictionary, they have been able to read most of the articles in daily life for general audience and purposes. They have had basic computer literacy (e.g., typing and basic functions of the keyboard) and experiences using email and the Internet.

3.2 Rationale for the Unit Plan

This instructional unit plan is designed to illustrate the pedagogical implications of the proposed writing model emphasizing context, cognition, and text, by applying the notion of “building formal schemata with ESL student writers”. In this unit, the students will be exposed to authentic articles and real communicative tasks. They will analyze the sample articles in light of the contexts and the cognitive processes to build appropriate formal schemata and develop effective cognitive strategies for specific writing tasks and contexts. Through implementing the notion of “formal schemata construction”, this unit covers a variety of issues related to ESL writing, such as: context of writing, content and formal schemata, reading and writing connections, process and product, computer technology and composition, intensive reading (to analyze context and form) and extensive reading (to retrieve information for the content of writing), as well as collaborative and individual writing activities.

3.3 Goals of the Unit Plan

In this unit, the students will work in groups to write a research report project on a topic after collecting information via the Internet. First, students brainstorm topics of interest to them, then search the Internet for articles and information, after that each group discusses the outline of the project and allocation of labor; finally, each group writes up the project and presents it. By the end of the unit, the students will be able to acquire such writing skills as: context analysis and summary, on-line discussions, invention techniques, Internet research, outlining, documenting sources, peer review and revision, and organizing a portfolio. In addition, the students will be able to use such technologies to facilitate writing, discussion, and presentation: Microsoft Word, Blackboard class management, Internet, Email, overhead projector, and PowerPoint.

3.4 Outline of the Unit

Lesson 1: Context and summary.

- a. The students brainstorm a few topics of interest, then google www.cnn.com or www.yahoo.com or VOA (<http://www.manythings.org/voa/scripts/>) for articles.

Example 1. Older People Go Back to College to Learn New Things

<http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/2007-01-23-voa3.cfm?renderforprint=1>

Example 2. Professor on leave over anti-war letters

<http://www.cnn.com/2003/EDUCATION/03/12/anti-war.letters.ap/index.html>

Example 3. From Mao to Yao: China's new cult

<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/06/11/china.celebrity.ap/index.html>

- b. Read an article of choice, analyzing context (purpose, audience, role; see also Matsuda, 1997a), content (main ideas), and form (organization and language feature).

Types of essay (see Leki, 1995):

- Argumentation—to persuade the readers or show them a new way to look at something
- Exposition --- to inform the readers or to demonstrate your knowledge

Rationale: Articles in real life are situated in real contexts. Thus the analysis of these contexts is meaningful. Also, the content of real life articles is usually more appealing to the students as opposed to textbook articles. As far as rhetorical form is concerned, however, the latter might outdo the former because they are well chosen to be included in a textbook. Therefore, here the primary purpose of choosing articles from real life is to look at their context and content; their textual organization is only secondary concern.

- c. Write a summary (with three components, i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion) of the article.
- d. Play with MS Word, read the tutorial
<http://www.ga.k12.pa.us/curtech/wordwork.htm>

Rationale: Writing summary is an essential skill of academic writing. It is particularly useful when it comes to writing abstracts, annotations, critiques, and literature reviews...etc. Summarizing connects reading with writing. Only when the students have a good comprehension of the text can they write a summary for it.

Lesson 2: Online discussions

- a. Teacher shows the students how to use Blackboard to participate in online discussions;
<http://www.uwex.edu/disted/home.html>
<http://www.gradeworks.com/>
- b. Students post on Blackboard their summaries and the URL of their articles;
- c. Students read and respond to the summaries;
- d. Students form a few groups based on a shared topic , with 3 to 4 people in each group working collaborately to write a report project on the topic.

Rationale: Blackboard class management creates a mini discourse community in which students write for a real audience (their peers and teachers). Furthermore, by responding to discussion threads and the works of their peers, the writers and the readers can closely interact with one another to increase their awareness of the relations between contexts and texts, and develop their cognitive strategies for analyzing and responding to contexts and texts.

Lesson 3: Invention techniques

First each student, then each group discuss the context and develop a thesis for their group project through brainstorming, free writing, cubing (thinking from different aspects), clustering (classifying the ideas), and looping (summarizing those ideas).

Rationale: Invention techniques deal with developing appropriate content (ideas) for appropriate context. On the other hand, invention techniques reveal the recursive aspect of the composing process which involves cognitive factors (e.g. content schemata)in writing.

Lesson 4: Internet research

- a. How to evaluate sources on the Internet?
Audience, Author/producer (credibility), Content (Accuracy, Currency)
<http://library.albany.edu/internet/>
- b. Conduct research via Internet (for more advanced students :library, interview, survey, experiment... etc.)
<http://library.albany.edu/internet/research.html>

Rationale: The Internet has become an increasingly powerful and convenient tool to locate information for research. One of the students' challenges is to do extensive but fast reading with the writing purpose in mind. In other words, they need to search materials to use in writing. Another concern is to evaluate the sources on the Internet to determine their suitability to be included in writing.

Lesson 5: Outlining

- a. Deconstruct a sample article; analyze context, content, and form(for textual analysis, see also Silva, 1990)
- b. Discuss and write the outline of the group project, post it on Blackboard;
- c. Provide feedback to the outlines.

Rationale: Poor writers only focus on grammar and mechanics; experienced writers pay more attention to macro level concerns such as organization. Aiming at developing the students' outlining skills, this lesson combines the product approach with the process approach. Students construct their formal schemata by analyzing model text in terms of context, content, and form. On the other hand, students develop their outlines on account of context.

Lesson 6: Documenting sources

- a. Sample article analysis (see Leki, 1995): Citation (Quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, synthesizing) and references (APA, MLA)
- b. Each group assigns parts of the project to the members;
- c. Each student writes up his/her own part.

Rationale: Documenting sources is essential for writing research paper. It is a relatively challenging skill for even graduate students. This lesson exposes the students to writing from multiple texts and avoiding plagiarism by citing appropriately. As for APA or MLA style, they are only required to have a general idea of it. A secondary aim in this class is to foster collaborative writing among group members.

Lesson 7: Peer review

- a. Criteria: clear, concrete, concise
- b. Organization: thesis, topic sentences, supporting details
- c. Paragraphs: Topic sentence, appeals, conjunctions
- d. Proofreading: spelling, punctuation and grammar
- e. Grammar error checklist (see also Xiao, 2002): at the sentence, paragraph and essay levels
- f. Polishing (word choice, sentence variation)
- g. Revision

Rationale: This lesson aims to improve the students' control over their own writing meanwhile become a critical reader of the peers' work through reviewing their own and one another's essays against the rubric and checklists. The students will be able to read as a writer and write as a reader. Furthermore, they will learn how to provide constructive feedback to their peers and incorporate feedback from their peers.

Lesson 8: Portfolio evaluation

- a. PowerPoint presentation of the group project.
- b. Submit personal portfolio for evaluation
- c. Analysis of the context (purpose, audience, role) and strengths of each of the following items: A summary, online discussion threads or email messages, invention process, outlines, first draft, final draft (with revised part highlighted), peer review comments.

Rationale: With PowerPoint, the students present the product of their group project; with portfolio, the students review individual progresses over time. In addition, the students develop metacognition for writing by context analysis and reflection on the strengths of each representative piece of their work.

3.5 A Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson 1: Context and Summary

Rationale: Articles in real life are situated in real contexts. Thus the analysis of these contexts is meaningful. Also, the content of real life articles is usually more appealing to the students as

opposed to textbook articles. As far as rhetorical form is concerned, however, the latter might outdo the former because they are well chosen to be included in a textbook. Therefore, the primary purpose of choosing articles from real life is to look at their context and content; their textual organization is only secondary concern.

Writing summary is an essential skill of academic writing. It is particularly useful when it comes to writing abstracts, annotations, critiques, and literature reviews...etc. Summarizing connects reading with writing. Only when the students have a good comprehension of the text, can they write a summary for it.

Objectives of the lesson:

- Upon completing the lesson, the students will be able:
- To search the Internet for information
- To analyze the context, content, and form of an article
- To identify types of essay
- To write a summary for an article
- To write with Microsoft Word

Materials/ Resources:

A wired computer for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, an overhead projector, a document projector and a screen.

| Time in Minutes | Activities | Objectives |
|-----------------|---|---|
| 15 | The students brainstorm a topic of interest, then search cnn.com or VOA for articles through key words, quotation marks, and +, -. (http://www.manythings.org/voa/scripts/). | To learn how to search the Internet for information. |
| 10 | Mini lecture on most common types of essay in academic writing (see Leki, 1995): Argumentation, exposition and narrative. | To identify the purpose of the essays: to persuade, to inform, and entertain. |
| 5 | Each student chooses an article from his or her search results. Discuss in pairs the type of essay it belongs to. | To practice what they have just learned. |

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| | | |
| 30 | <p>Mini lecture on analyzing context (purpose, audience, role; see also Matsuda, 1997a), content (main ideas), and form (organization and language feature). Demonstrate it with a sample article.</p> <p><i>Break for 10 minutes</i></p> | <p>To increase the students' awareness of context, content, and form</p> <p>To build formal schemata for specific writing tasks and contexts.</p> |
| 20 | Each student reads the article of choice, analyzes the context, content, and form, and takes notes for the analysis. | To practice context analysis and reinforce the schemata for content and form. |
| 10 | <p>Mini lecture on how to write a summary (with 3 components, i.e., introduction, body, and conclusion) for an article.</p> <p>Demonstrate it with a sample article.</p> | To build formal schemata for Summary writing. |
| 20 | Each student reads the article of choice again and writes a summary. | Practice summary writing and reinforce formal schemata for summary. |
| 10 | <p>Play with Microsoft Word, learn how to open, save, and print a new document, cut & paste, check grammar and spelling.</p> <p>Read the tutorial: http://www.ga.k12.pa.us/curtech/wordwork.htm</p> | To learn how to use Microsoft Word to write. |

Assignments and evaluation:

In a Microsoft Word document, students electronically submit their analysis of context, content, and form of the article they choose, along with a summary of the article. Students will

be evaluated on the basis of the quality of their own context analysis, summary, and Word document.

4. Future Research

Here is a possible research agenda with research foci and methods to employ for future research on the theme “ Building formal schemata with ESL writers”: A. a literature review on interactions among context, cognition, and textual form across disciplines (a reflective inquiry); B. a qualitative study to examine how the ESL writers construct and activate L2 formal schemata during reading and composing processes (using think-aloud protocols); C. pedagogy (syllabus design); D. a quantitative study to examine the effectiveness of the pedagogy (experimental design).

Specifically, in-depth research is needed to examine the proposed writing model by investigating the interactions among context, cognition, and textual organization across disciplines. Such studies may explore answers to the following questions: How does a writer identify, analyze, and respond to a given context of writing? On the other hand, what textual features embody the impact of cognition and context? What are the differences and similarities across languages, disciplines, and individuals?

Further research also needs to be done on the ESL student writers’ processes of formal schemata construction and activation. When the ESL students build their formal schemata through reading and analyzing model texts and through the composing process, how are context, cognition, and textual organization come into play? Studies of this nature may examine the kind of decisions the ESL student writers make in their composing process as they informed by their formal schemata. What kind of decisions do the ESL student writers make in their composing process as they informed by their formal schemata? Probably think-aloud protocols can be used to solicit information on ESL students’ strategy of building and activating formal schemata in L2.

On the basis of research findings, syllabi can be designed to address the needs of students of ESL writing class by helping them construct their formal schemata for L2. The syllabi should be contextualized too, targeting at specific learner populations. Finally, a quantitative research can be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of various pedagogies embracing the notion of formal schemata construction. For instance, two comparable groups of international graduate students may receive two types of teaching methods - one focuses on formal schemata

construction, the other is current-traditional rhetoric paragraph writing. Holistic scoring and primary-trait scoring for the subjects' timed essays can be applied to assess their writing performance after treatment. The results can be compared across groups and analyzed.

5. Conclusion

“Constructivism does not claim to have made earth-shaking inventions in the area of education; it merely claims to provide a solid conceptual basis for some of the things that, until now, inspired teachers had to do without theoretical foundation” (Von Glasersfeld, 1995). It is hoped that the proposed writing model of context, cognition, and text can bring insights into writing research and that the perception of “building formal schemata with ESL writers” can be a conceptual addition to the field of second language writing. Rhetorical form has been an actual central concern in ESL writing research and teaching but lacking a theoretical foundation. Under the framework of constructivism, schema theory with cognitive and social perspectives on acquiring rhetorical knowledge may help enrich the theoretical foundation of second language writing research in general and of contrastive rhetoric research in particular.

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