The Socio-Cognitive Approach to Teaching Writing

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Abstract. This article gives information about the phases of ESP/EST development which was characterized by a focus on language for specific purposes, with an emphasis on the analysis of language needs and the creation of specialized materials. The shift towards a more communicative approach, with an increased focus on discourse analysis and the integration of language and content was analyzed The third phase, in the 1990s, saw a further development of the communicative approach, with an increased emphasis on genre analysis and the use of authentic materials. The movement towards a more critical approach, with an increased focus on power relations and the role of language in social contexts.

Each of these phases had a different impact on the type of teaching materials used in ESP/EST. In the first phase, materials were often created by ESP/EST specialists and were highly specialized and technical in nature. In the second phase, materials became more communicative and integrated language and content. In the third phase, materials became more authentic and genre-based. In the fourth phase, materials became more critical and focused on social issues.

Key words: Second language writing, recursive nature, cohesion and coherence, thinking processes, macro-rhetorical goal, socio-cognitive approach.

The evolution of ESP/EST has been characterized by a move towards a more communicative and integrated approach, with an increasing emphasis on authenticity and criticality. As ESP teachers and materials designers, it is important to be aware of these developments and to consider how they might impact our teaching and materials design decisions.

The controlled approach to teaching writing, which dominated in the 1950s and 1960s, focused on the mastery of sentence-level structures and grammar rules. Students were given drills and exercises to practice grammar and sentence patterns. However, this approach was criticized for producing formulaic writing that lacked creativity and originality.

The process approach emerged in the 1970s and emphasized the recursive nature of the writing process, which includes prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Students were encouraged to generate ideas, organize their thoughts, and revise their writing based on feedback from peers and teachers. This approach was praised for promoting student engagement and creativity.

There have been paradigm shifts in approaches to teaching academic writing over the last few decades (Paltridge, Harbon, Hirsh, Shen, Stevenson, Phakiti, & Woodrow, 2009). From the mid-1940s to mid-1960s, controlled composition was practiced widely in writing classes. Such a teaching approach aims to improve the accuracy of students' written works, based on a behaviorist view that repetition and imitation will lead to habit formation (e.g., writing grammatically correct sentences). An example of controlled composition is for teachers to give sample sentences of a chosen structure, and then students are tasked to write a few sentences following that pattern

The genre approach, which gained popularity in the 1990s, focused on teaching students the conventions of different genres of writing, such as narratives, reports, and persuasive essays. Students were taught to recognize the features of each genre and to produce writing that followed the conventions of the genre. This approach was criticized for neglecting the importance of creativity and individual expression.

The socio-cognitive approach to teaching writing emphasizes the social and cognitive aspects of writing. It recognizes that writing is a complex activity that involves not only linguistic skills but also cognitive processes such as planning, monitoring, evaluating, and revising. The approach emphasizes the importance of providing students with explicit instruction in these processes and creating a supportive classroom environment that fosters collaboration and feedback.

The revised version of Flower and Hayes' (1981) writing model sets out writing processes as hierarchical, rather than linear. Therefore, each of actions listed in the model can occur at any time (p. 367). The act of writing involves two major elements – the task environment and the individual. The task environment includes anything that is external of the writer starting from the audience to the text generated at hand. The audience promotes the writing and collaborators facilitate it. In the classroom setting, the audience and collaborators can merge from time to time. When the writing process begins, a new element which is the "growing text" enters. It restricts what can come next exerting control over the choice of vocabulary and content on the 'text so far'.

Sociocognitive approach views language learning from an interactionist perspective which gives prime importance to interaction in language learning. This approach further claims that language learning occurs when learner‟s internal mechanism interacts with linguistic environment and social environment (Ellis, 1994, p. 243)

To enhance the quality of second language writing, teachers can use strategies such as modeling, scaffolding, and providing feedback. Modeling involves demonstrating good writing practices through examples and modeling the thinking processes involved in writing. Scaffolding involves providing support and guidance to students as they engage in writing tasks. Feedback involves providing students with specific and constructive feedback on their writing, focusing on both strengths and areas for improvement.

Understanding the complexity of writing is essential to effective teaching of writing. Teachers can draw on various approaches to teaching writing, including the controlled approach, process approach, genre approach, and socio-cognitive approach. By providing explicit instruction in the writing process and creating a supportive classroom environment, teachers can help students develop the skills and strategies needed to become competent writers.

"A simplistic view of writing would assume that written language is simply the graphic representation of spoken language…" (Brown, 2001:335). Writing is more complex than this; hence writing pedagogy is important, as Brown states by claiming that writing is "as different from speaking as swimming is from walking" (2001:335).

Writing competence is about composing an effective piece of written work to fulfill a specific purpose. For example, when writing an entertaining and engaging story, students adopt a narrative style and rhetorical moves in order to fulfill the requirements of a specialized context (e.g., classroom practice, take-home assignment, or in-class examination). Once students are aware of the importance of the purpose, audience, and context of the writing, they can employ the following basic academic discourse skills to achieve effective implementation (Cheung, Y. L. (2016)).

Lexical variety is an important part of successful writing because it can make an essay appear sophisticated and interesting. Lexical variety refers to "interesting word choice or effective use of vocabulary in writing" (Ferris, 2014, p. 89). Texts with greater lexical variety tend to score higher and leave a better impression with the readers. Students can consult a built-in thesaurus and dictionary in word processing software, consider the sentence context, and maintain a consistent level of formality if they want to improve lexical variety in their writing (Ferris, 2014, pp. 100-103). However, lexical variety alone is insufficient for creating a good essay. Other aspects such as content, development of ideas, quality of argumentation, correct use of grammar, and mechanics are equally important.

Traditionally, many writing teachers explicate the writing process as a linear process (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). For example, Paltridge, et al. (2009) identifies four distinct sub-processes in writing. First, in the conceptualizing stage, writers generate and select ideas that they can use in their writing, and organize the ideas in a neat way (e.g., an essay must have an introduction, body, and a conclusion). The second sub-process is called formulating, which means putting ideas into sentences. The third sub-process is revising, where writers rewrite and improve the essays. The revisions can be related to the content, grammar, and mechanics. The fourth subprocess is reading. Writers read the essay's instruction. They read to gather information for the essay topic. They re-read their writing to make sure that they are answering the essay's prompts. The linear process model may "underconceptualize and oversimplify" the writing process (Emig, 1971, p. 98).

Though the teachers were shown to utilize most of the instructional scaffolding functions, for future research, more studies need to be conducted to find out which instructional scaffolding functions will be predominantly used and for what kinds of writing genres in addition to how these functions will vary with different groups of teachers and students. Still, the adapted instructional scaffolding functions provide a means for teachers to mediate the learning of writing and the present study suggests that both teachers and trainers in teacher education courses might usefully pay more attention to developing teachers' understandings of the role of mediating learning to write through instructional scaffolding functions [Walqui, A, 2006].

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