VOICES THAT COMPETE WITH STUDENTS' WRITING PROCESS: A CASE STUDY OF LEARNERS FROM LESS ENDOWED COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, many researchers have turned their attention to ways of improving general classroom practice for effective learning in Second Language situations. Through interviews and analyses of personal essays, this study extends the scope of existing research by examining ways in which the societal norms of students in deprived communities largely built on an interdependency culture prevent or enhances effective teaching and learning. The research reveals that personal essays of thirty-eight students of a Senior High School in Ghana who live in low to middle-income communities, are shaped by the subjects' socioeconomic background, school culture, as well as teaching method used in English language lessons in content and form.

Keywords: L2 Writing, Equity Pedagogy, Language and Culture, Language and Identity

INTRODUCTION

English is Ghana's second language and the language of officialdom: it is the language of instruction in all schools after the first three years of basic education. Even though care is taken to teach learners to use the language effectively at all levels of primary and secondary education, some teachers of English at the university level and researchers assert that the proficiency level of many university students who have successfully passed the English language examinations at the primary and secondary levels of education, is generally low.

Several attempts have been made by educationists in Ghana to improve English proficiency skills of students. Towards offering remedial support to students, researchers identify language problems that have been carried over from pre-university institutions to freshman programmes. For example, Dako (1997) and Adam (1997) point out that students' essays lack cohesion and clarity of expression. And, a research by Adika and Owusu-Sekyere (1997) discusses, among other errors, students' wrong use of words and spelling-related problems, which result in lack of clarity of expression. Furthermore, Adam (1997) and Dako (1997) point out problems related to the ineffective use of cohesive devices, as well as

lack of self-expression.

Some researchers have identified the causes of the problems discussed. For example, Adika (1999) attributes lack of cohesion and the indiscriminate assumption of shared knowledge between writer and the reader to students' lack of understanding of the interactive nature of writing (p.162). Adam (1997), on the other hand, laments that in some instances the writing quality of students' work is ignored by instructors, as individual attention is almost non-existent. On the part of students, he bemoans their lack of interest in reading and writing outside the minimum requirements demanded at school. Odamtten *et al.* (1994), in addition, trace the problem to inadequate time allotted to the comprehensive syllabus of the English language as a subject in secondary schools, student-teacher ratios, and the calibre of teachers.

Following the notion that the writing of second language learners should be viewed as a resource in the curriculum rather than a specimen to prove that standards are falling (Lillis and Scott 2007; Archer 2007; Paxton 2001), this paper identifies and describes societal influences from socioeconomic backgrounds, school practices and language teaching methods that impact the personal written voice in second language learners' personal essays. It investigates the social identity of a group of learners and the environmental influences that shape an individual's learning process and outcomes. Coleman's (1996) concept of society is here considered as a working definition:

> … all of those wider (and overlapping) contexts in which are situated the institutions in which language teaching takes place. These include – but are not limited to – the international, national, community, ethnic, bureaucratic, professional, political, religious, linguistic, economic and family contexts in which schools and other educational institutions are located and with what they interact. (Coleman 1996:1)

The study further reveals how these influences may be pointers not only to what have been identified as problems, but also to ways of assessing conditions that may enhance the quality of English Language Learning.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

This study can be located within the area of applied linguistics. Under applied linguistics, the role of culture, social and previous educational background in shaping language-learning and teaching processes, as well as teacher and student expectation is considered. Therefore the research draws its

inspiration from contrastive rhetoric research.

Contrastive rhetoric research is an area that requires ethnographic studies in communication. It examines preferred L1 rhetorical patterns used by various L2 speakers, such as Asians, Arabs, Germans (Clyne 1981, 1991; Hinds 1990; Ostler 1987; Cheng 1985), as they write essays in English. It has been revealed that the rhetorical norms of one's L1 influences text construction in one's L2.

Clyne's 1981 research, for example, takes a critical look at the organizational preferences of written discourse for German and English writers. According to Clyne, the writing pattern of L1 English is generally linear, while that employed by German writers is considered as rather 'haphazard'. Drawing on Clyne (1981), Grabe and Kaplan (1996) note that content, rather than organizational pattern of the text, is important for the German.

Another study reveals that the 'quasi-inductive style' of major Asian languages as described by Hinds (1990), is obviously different from the more coherent and deductive patterns taught in Western colleges (Grabe and Kaplan 1996; Casanave 2004). Hinds also argues that the Japanese apply a four-unit system of writing: the *ki- shoo- ten- ketsu* framework adopted from classical Chinese poetry. According to him, 'Ki' represents the beginning of the argument; 'Shoo' provides support for the argument and 'Ten' develops the sub theme, paying little attention to unity in English; 'Ketsu', the conclusion, a reader-responsible technique, does not tie loose ends together as would be expected by the native English reader.

Arabic ESL writers, according to Ostler (1987), are also identified by their tendency to use a series of coordinators and parallel constructions in their essays, which reflect a rhetorical pattern akin to that of classical Arabic, and the Koran.

If the rhetorical patterns of the people's L1 can affect ways they develop texts, then it is likely that some of the differences identified in undergraduate essays by researchers in Ghana may be traced to the conditions that prevail in their communities, and how these conditions impinge on learners' writing.

Indeed, in the area of language teaching, knowledge of students' social identity is important, since it helps teachers to constantly shape classroom activities for effective learning. Hence, this research proposes that a study of students' essays is likely to reveal, beyond L1 patterns as observed in previous research, societal influences that have an impact on learners.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Three major considerations informed choices made during the data-collection stage, for the purpose of identifying societal influences on students' writing patterns. The school had to have some identifiable and analysable features for the purpose of categorization, then the students had to fall, largely, within a certain socioeconomic bracket (albeit stereotypical); and, classes selected had to reflect learners who were homogenous, at least in terms of subject choice. Though the classes were different in terms of subject specialization, they had to be taught by one teacher.

A government assisted-day-public-co-educational Senior High School in Ghana, was selected for the study, for four additional reasons: it caters mostly for the educational needs of students living in and around a small neighbouring town, and approximately 87 per cent of its students coming from low or lower middle income families who live in deprived, but developing communities. Furthermore, as a result of the 2009 Ghana Education reform which graded schools according to available facilities and their capacity to admit students on a scale of A to D ('A' being the best – usually reflecting historical prestige and high academic performance), the school selected for this study was listed as a category 'C' school– pointing to the fact that it is generally not considered as an elite school, even though some students are self-motivated and are likely to make significant academic gains. From what is known about the school, and its students, the data were analysed against the backdrop that most students experienced academic challenges, and against the fact that home environment might not provide ample opportunities for effective out-of-class work because of students' socioeconomic background.

The school, which is classified as a Methodist Church school with teachers who are interested in instilling Christian principles in the lives of the students through programmes, such as early morning and monthly 'devotion' (meetings), to support this agenda, is also likely to influence learners. Thus the impact of this school 'culture' on student essays was also investigated.

To analyse the impact of society on student writing, essay samples of two classes studying the following core subjects: English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Integrated Science were selected. These students had been further categorized into elective subject area groupings. Thus, a second-year home economics class, and a fourth-year business (final year secretarial option) class were selected for this study. Members of the final-year class were preparing to write the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), which is taken at the end of secondary school education, for the purpose of admitting students to universities and other institutions.

The choice of subject-specific classes– business, and home economics, and two sets of students who had received tuition in an English programme for two and four years respectively was also deliberate, since the two subjects were compared for the effect of years of schooling on acculturation – the process of acquiring a 'new/academic culture' as a second language learner (Schumann 1978; Gardner 1985). For a better assessment of the teaching and learning process, the researcher chose these two groups of learners from two different subject-area backgrounds, but taught by one teacher. The impact of the teacher's delivery style on two classes, different in their composition and different in terms of exposure to the English language, was also assessed.

A take-home essay titled '*In pursuit of excellence,*' was collected and analysed. Twenty-six essays were received from the home economics class of forty, while fourteen were received from the business class of forty-one students at the end of the two-week deadline given by the teacher. This lackadaisical attitude of the students has implications for overall conclusion of the study. Even though the unedited essay samples were very few, patterns that emerged were worth considering.

The likelihood of sections of student essays reflecting imagined rather than real information existed. Consequently, interviews granted by the researcher helped to eliminate rhetorical features in essays that were not reflective of societal influence on learning. Background information on students and their writing processes, was also obtained through personal and group interviews with the teacher and students.

Taken together, the methods were employed to investigate the following:
A. Whether students' personal essays were shaped by their
   socioeconomic background.
B. Whether students' personal essays were shaped by a school culture i.e., the preferred rhetorical structure of students' antecedent school norms (self/individualism versus collectivism), and also shaped by teaching method(s) applied by teacher.
C. Whether these findings had implications for English language teaching and learning.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data collected from interviews and essays revealed that the written voice of members of the final-year home economics and second-year business class from low and middle-income communities was shaped by societal influences. Hence, findings would be discussed in terms of the subjects' stratum. The extent to which the teacher was affected by these influences would also be discussed, since it might have implications for English Language Learning (ELL) in general.

EFFECTS OF SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Where students grew up and lived for most part of their lives was bound to affect their proficiency in English. This research would reveal the impact of family background characteristics and economic status on the rhetorical features of student essays. Even though there seemed to be an absence of a well-defined class structure in Ghana (Assimeng 1981: 123), and students were uncertain about where they belonged in a social class system, one thing that seemed clear was that about 75 per cent of members of both classes who submitted their essays indicated that they were likely to be members of low-to-middle class/income level, since their parents had to make enormous sacrifices in order to educate them. Most of these parents worked in factories in Tema, an industrial city or did petty training, while others worked extra hard as single mothers to fend for their children, and to pay school fees. In fact, one student confessed to engaging in petty trading to take care of her needs in school. Therefore, most of the students in the school largely depended on books supplied by the school, since their parents rarely bought books and other resources to enhance learning under the circumstances that they found themselves.

This offered a great challenge to the teacher, since economic resource was obviously an important factor to students' exposure to the target language and its culture. For example, poor Ghanaian students with academically-challenged-non-English-speaking parents, who has very little or no access to educational television, books or a computer-based learning environment will largely, rely on the school system for information on the outside world. As (Collins and Halverson, 2009) suggest, school, for most students, is the place where they are taught to survive in a changing world. However, a grade 'C' school that lacks ample resources poses immense problems to learning. It was, therefore, not surprising that students complained that their school lacked adequate textbooks. The consequence of this was the paucity of ideas expressed in the essays, as a result of their limited exposure to the world around them (See example 3a and 3b below). Though their desire to be upwardly mobile was made evident in many cases (See example 1a and 1b; 2a and 2b below), their lack of a good reading habit, and their need for vocabulary expansion, as evidenced by unconventional phonetic-spelling style, was revealing:

- Practics: practice
- Horsies: horses
- Edly: elderly

Below are some extracts from an essay that required students to talk about how they would achieve success in life. Responses from both classes reflected a paucity of imagination and ideas, and seemed to be pointers to their socioeconomic background:

Home economics class (2nd year)

1a)   We must involve ourself in church activities to gain popularity. All these will help in pursuit of excellence.

Business class (4th year)

1b)   The saying that "Practics makes one perfect is applicable here. Through reading, students join the elite class and he is exposed to greater stock of vocabularies that will help students to fine themselves with ease in examination. Hence because the students refuse to read, their not able to do well in their exams.

Home economics class (2nd year)

2a)   And also have a responsible husband who can help me in term of need. I think me being a nurse can change my family status... I will be recognized in the family to be first in history to be call a nurse so God help me to be.
        Amen.

Business class (4th year)

2b)   I aim highly at becoming a police in future and what I am doing towards my dreams, eventually some one may ask every body says he or she want to become this and that, believing me interesting one only become what he wants to be when he or her focus, learn, accept corrections, respect and follow instruction. There is a saying which goes if wishes was to come true beggars will had ride horsies.

Home economics class (2nd year)

3a)   One have to help their parents in the house like running errands and taking care of the younger sibling so that they also help them in their schooling.

Business class (4th year)

3b)   I have to respect the edly people in the community and help any edly person who is in need of help to carry things, from places like helping someone who is carrying a lot of things from the market to a lorry station.

It was further disclosed by the class teacher, that even though teachers taught the structure of the target language, students' poor reading habits, coupled with their home environment that placed little demand on their use of the English language out of class, hampered self-expression. Many students selected for this study had graduated from equally deprived, low-performing primary and Junior High Schools (JHS). The words of a second year student said it all:

> Academically, I will wake up at dawn, and pray before I study since I will not get the time to learn in the evening, I will come to school early and do my school work early so that I will be able to prepare for the day, at the same time I will take my studies very serious since studying effectively means study in such a way that your efforts and time spent in reading, understanding and taking examination yields the maximum result and I know that my success in school depends on my ability to study effectively and efficiently and more over I will take part in school activities.

Under such circumstances, it was little wonder that the final year students experienced the same difficulties that the second years did.

This section described the effects of socioeconomic conditions of students from less endowed communities on language development. Content, as well as language skills are domains of writing skills that need to be sharpened. The writing style of final-year students, when compared with that of the second-year students, reflected no significant difference in terms of content and style, thus revealing how little impact the number of years spent in their English class had had on their proficiency skills.

To appreciate the situation further, it was important to investigate opportunities available for language development provided by the school environment. The following section reveals an observed school culture, and teaching method which made the school system an unlikely source of significant academic gain.

SCHOOL CULTURE AND TEACHING METHOD APPLIED

Ede (1989) posits that the situation in which a writer finds him/herself largely contributes to the shape, style and tone of the written discourse produced. To prove Ede, first the school investigated was a mission school, where the teacher was looked up to for sound moral and Christian behaviour. This school culture was summed up in the words of a student:

> And above all, in everything that we do God must be the first on our list. As a
> Christian, I must do my possible best to do what the Holy book of law says, 'the
> Bible'. It is my duty to attend church every Sunday to exercise my faith in Christ.
> <u>As a student of a mission school, it is my duty to attend church every Fridays [sic]</u>
> <u>and church parades once every term. To excel in life, God is the only person to</u>
> <u>help us achieve this aim. Excelling in life involves all these three qualities to</u>
> <u>achieve your aim.</u>

Second, the teacher employed a face-saving teaching method. This encouraged collaborative learning, since students with weak writing skills were hardly able to work independently of colleagues. While lack of confidence made weaker students adopt a collectivist approach to learning, lack of a conducive home environment for effective learning, prevented a number of students from submitting assignments on time, thereby, leaving little room for independent and regular practice. The effect of the students' faith, and the collaborative mode of learning, seemed to have created a culture of dependency which made learners less assertive, where stronger arguments were needed to support claims made.

SCHOOL CULTURE

The school's Christian culture, and language filtered through the written voice of essays analysed. All essays had something to say about the importance of religion to academic excellence, though how this was or could be achieved was not discussed in their over-generalised supports to claims made. This fact lent credence to the notion that supports taken from beliefs of religious faiths were usually uncontested by followers.

In a research conducted by Johnstone (1986), for example, the argumentative patterns of two personalities during a 1979 interview between Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini and an Italian journalist, Oriana Fallaci, were analysed. While the latter used a Western pattern of argumentation in which statements were supported with evidence and data, the Ayatollah was said to have used parables from the Koran and analogies from proverbs to support points. Furthermore, in providing grounds for his argument, he used examples from Islam (Connor 1996). His argumentation strategy which was replete with analogies and parables from the Koran might be traced to rhetorical strategies also employed by Farsi (Persian), the national language of Iran. It was interesting to note that both groups of students observed in this study adopted similar writing strategies – indicating a 'fossilized style', and group solidarity that captured the Christian faith or beliefs of the students' school community, as they discussed what it takes to be successful:

Home Economics class (2nd year)

4a)   <u>We need to go to the house of God, to listen</u> to what the preacher has for us. <u>This will also guide us from any spiritual matters and will excel in life</u>.

Business class (4th year)

4b)   More over, in the religious background, one must be a God fearing person, know the bible very and <u>abide by the word of the almighty Lord to also strengthen him or her to pursuit an excellency</u>**.** And also going to church everyday to <u>listen to the word of God to be part of his or her life</u>, one must live a chest life, be honest, respect, tactful and fruitful.

Home Economics class (2nd year)

5a)   I must also serve God in truth and in faith in order to excel<u>. It is written in the bible that God sent his son Jesus Christ to die for our sins, so I must serve God with all my mind, body and soul. The bible said our body is the temple of God so I must keep my body holy and concentrate on my studies in order to excel in life.</u>

Business class (4th year)

5b)   Wen we go to our places of worship we learn a lot from the Bible and the role model of some of the people in the Bible and as we continue to put these things together our minds and ideas enlarges which make it very easy for us to achieve academic excellence.

Home Economics class (2nd year)

6a)   And morally**,** <u>we need to read the word of God. That's the Holy Bible so that I can really excel in life, and it is said that in everything God first. And this goes with our religious background</u>.

Business class (4th year)

6b)   Another factor contributing to one to achieve he's or her aim is pay attention and allowing himself to be corrected when gone wrong or astray, <u>the Bible say that he that hate corrections is a fool meaning of you accept your mistake and receive maximum correction you are blessed.</u>

Home Economics class (2nd year)

7a)   <u>I am an average student in my class but praise be to God that he has given me power over failure. Now I see myself as a success and this will follow me all the days of my life on earth.</u>

Business class (4th year)

7b)   In religious life, one must be a Christian to know the word of God, to abide by it for God's blessing to be excellence in life… God bless those who win souls that are loss for him.

Home Economics class (2nd year)

8a)   In fact before I can do well in class to excel, I have to learn very hard ask God to grant me the wisdom of Solomon so that I can pass well.

Business class (4th year)

8b)   One cannot attain excellence without the influence or intervention of divine <u>favour from God.</u> This means that, wisdom must be seeked from God to achieve excellence.

Home Economics class (2nd year)

9a)   <u>I need to learn without ceasing</u> since more effort is required to become excellent.

Business class (4th year)

9b)   I must make sure I obey my parents as well as my neighbour <u>Taking my worship very serious and read my bible everyday… I must avoid smoking and stealing and breaking of societal properties</u>. The above doing or attitudes will pursued me for excellent in life.

Home Economics class (2nd year)

10a)   Again, one has to be obedient and respectful to their parents and the elderly people <u>because God said 'honour your father and mother so that we will live long on earth'. One must also be humble so that God will lift him high and help him in all things they do.</u>

Business class (4th year)

10b)   <u>To become such a prominent person of excellence is just going to be by the grace of God,</u> and before the grace of God is going to be abundant <u>in my life, there are conditions to conform to…</u>I have to pray always and refuse to do what will please man. <u>By so doing I believe God will</u> cause His <u>face to shine upon my life.</u>

Parts of student essays that referred to religion have been categorized as follows:

1) **The importance of church attendance:**

We need to go to the house of God, to listen to what the preacher has for us. This will also guide us from any **spiritual matters** and will excel in life.

2) **Quotes or paraphrased bible verses to support claim:**

Again, one has to be obedient and respectful to their parents and the elderly people because God said "honour your father and mother so that we will live long on earth". One must also be humble so that God will lift him high and help him in all things they do.

3) **Reference to Bible characters as role models:**

In fact before I can do well in class to excel, I have to learn very hard ask God to grant me the wisdom of Solomon so that I can pass well.

4) **The use of words and phrases usually spoken by preachers:**

I am an average student in my class but praise be to God that he has given me power over failure. Now I see myself as a success and this will follow me all the days of my life on earth.

Though weak as supports to claims made, the above statements reflected their viewpoint of what good writing is, which is no different from what occurs in some Chinese classes. Li (1996, in Ramanathan and Atkinson 1999), who studied school-based writing in Chinese and in Western contexts, asserts that good writing, to the Chinese, is that which captures high moral standards upheld in their society.

Furthermore, a careful study of the above text samples, would explain why the students, in their essays, were less assertive in their delivery. Their utterances further explained why they continuously looked up to 'role models' in others, than in themselves. As both second and final-year students employed the same communication strategy, it was important for the researcher to investigate teaching style in order to determine how, within constraints previously discussed, the students gained access to the English language to help them shape their writing abilities. The next sub section of this paper examines the classroom situation and teacher-delivery method(s).

TEACHING METHOD APPLIED

The samples above exposed the weak arguments of students as they relied on what had been

taught at Church and school prayer sessions and made unnecessary a more analytical approach which would require extensive discussions of points. Again, the information provided by the students revealed a dependency on an external force to be able to work well. This section would look at the teacher's delivery method in order to understand why final year students wrote the way they did. Two main teaching approaches were adopted: an authoritarian approach which students felt comfortable with, and group work that supported the efforts of weaker students. A discussion of this nature should state why the students enjoyed these methods:

- There are many personalities in our society who can serve as a role model. I then have to follow their footsteps in pursuit of excellent.

- Again, one can be excellent by learning from people who have made it in life.

- In the social aspect too we can also learn from those around us. For example one can be very weak at mathematics whiles another person will also be good at such area so as we establish cordial relationship between those people we can learn much from them and at the end we would achieve excellence which is our main target.

- To add to that, one has to friends if they do not understand what the teacher have taught and doing homeworks and classwork when is given and submit it early. And doing re-searching and also help in pursuit of excellence.

- I should share with friends, help those are in need and share opinions with them. I must be in good terms with everybody. Help those who are weak in learning and by so doing I might learn things which I would forget.

- I have to behave like a student who is under the teachers being trained. In class I have to show love, respect and be truthful to my mate so that they can help me with any difficult subject I found myself lost in. when I am being rude, no one will like to come close to me and because of my rudeness I will even find it difficult to approach any mate and ask them to help me in this subject. If they fail to teach me at the and I am the one to lose. So I have to be my friends keeper.

- A student who obey his teachers and learn everything that his teacher teaches will be ex-cellence in life. He/she learn and pass all his examination to become successful in life. By doing all the moral, social and academic life one will become excellence in life.

- Socially, I have to at the way I behave with my schoolmates. Not because they are in the same class with so I do not respect them especially my class prefects I should respect all

of them because she is the leader of our class may be she is or may be I am older than her but because she is the leader of the class I need t respect her.

- I have to obey and respect authority so that I can excel in life. When the teacher is in the classroom I not have to talk and when the teacher is talking I don't' have to also talk.

- I must pay attention in class to understand what been taught. I must listen instructions from teachers and obey those in authority. I must take my book seriously, use any opportunity time to learn and also use the time profitable

It seemed that the concept of individuality, for the students, lay in connectedness to people around them (Markus and Kitayama 1991). This culture of interdependency was also observed in the Chinese students discussed in Scollon and Scollon (1991). A written voice which, rather than being assertive in discussing issues, was muffled by the voice of the group which the writer associated him/herself, was at variance with the Western concept of self (Ramanathan V and D. Atkinson 1999; Elbow 1981), and the proponents of expressionism, which is individualistic in nature.

According to the teacher, students always experienced a mental block when asked to write; therefore, an outline was often provided on the board, with the help of the teacher. This apprenticeship approach (Bloome 1993), which viewed the teacher as the provider of knowledge turned students into mere recipients of information – an attitude carried over from the rhetorical pattern of church discourse, as expressed above. Since the teacher's plan was relied on, all essays presented by the students bore the same or similar ideas. Latham (2001), explains that students from low economic backgrounds feel academically incompetent and teachers respond to them by asking them to memorize materials through teacher dominated activities, and simple tests (Lipman 2004; Gibbons 2009). The effect of this teaching approach has been discussed in this section.

It was observed that the face-saving and collectivist approach to teaching and learning, seemed to have two levels of effect on students' writing: total dependency and partial dependency that revealed the likelihood of students' ability to write independently.

THE CULTURE OF TOTAL DEPENDENCY

Two students in each class copied the entire essay of other students, thus totally depending on more capable others for help, while 60 per cent of students in both classes depended partially on others. The essays of these students looked similar in form as well as in content. However, this category of writers made word-level changes of parts of paragraphs before submitting the essays to their teacher,

thus, exhibiting some tendency towards independent thinking. The third category of writers adhered to the form and content of other writers, but made attempts to draw on the language of their discipline to shape their writing, however imperfectly.

All 26 essays on "*In pursuit of excellence,*" from the home economics class, and all 14 essays from the business class were divided into, and discussed in three major body-paragraphs, with topic sentences on: social, moral or religious, and academic issues. Wondering why students could not explore other issues or explore ideas beyond these limitations, the researcher, in an interview with the class teacher, found out that in order to get students to write, she had to provide a model and this model was considered as the blueprint by all students (because all teachers, to them, were the custodians of knowledge). Essays were therefore similar in form, and style.

What was important here was that the cultural tendency to get hooked wholly on the ideas of friends they looked up to, through copying essays, or 'paraphrasing' from friends, coupled with the attitude of students who refused to do some independent thinking when they could copy entire essays, was a source of worry at this stage. If not monitored, practice of this nature would lead to plagiarism at different levels as students, in the same way, relied on textbook materials, their 'role model in an author' to fill their communication gaps without recourse to acknowledging their sources. Even though Sowden (2005) has been criticised by Liu (2005), for making a similar 'dubious claim', when he studied the essays of students from far East Asia, especially China, the researcher, like Sowden, was of the view that students with weak language background could easily lean totally on their 'trusted model', even if this practice continued to feed them with a skill they must eventually unlearn.

Though the writing approach discussed might have its disadvantage, a teacher could identify and use such examples as a springboard for teaching lessons in effective summarizing and paraphrasing.

THE CULTURE OF PARTIAL DEPENDENCY

The examples that follow show how evidence of some degree of 'independence', should be viewed as a glimmer of hope towards a more expressionist approach to writing which encouraged the development, and use of one's unique personal voice (Li, 1996).

Below is an example of a paragraph from two essays that fall within the second category of writers, i.e. partial dependency. Extracts from two student's essays, student 'A' and Student 'B' of the business class, would be used to illustrate the point. These have been numbered to facilitate the discussion.

EXAMPLE 1

Student A: Paragraph 2:

1. The pursuit of excellence however, demands certain <u>values</u> such as self

2. actualisation, self recognition and the capabilities of an individuals.

3. These <u>values</u> play**s** a <u>vital</u> role in one's life.

Student B: Paragraph 2:

1.The pursuit of excellence however, demands certain <u>concepts</u> such as self

2. actualisation, self recognition and the capabilities of an individual.

3.These <u>concepts</u> play a <u>major</u> role in <u>persuing for excellence</u>.

While in Line 1 and 3, student 'A' uses the word "values," Student 'B' substitutes it for "concepts". Again, student A's "vital role" in 1, is also changed to "major role" in 3 of student B's paragraph. Lines 2 and 3, also reveal student 'A's weakness in concord: "capabilities of an **individuals**." and "These values **plays** a vital role…."

EXAMPLE 2

The term of *heteroglossia* (Bakhtin 1986), which applies to a situation where writers draw on their varied experiences in text-construction was made evident, when two students, unlike all others who used the name 'God' in their essays, chose to refer to God as 'Jehovah' and 'Allah' respectively:

Student 1: If I want to succeed in life I have to give myself to Allah, I should always pray to him to help me in anything I want in life and I will never give up in life, I will always fight to get what I want.

Student 2: if I want to succeed in life I have to give myself to Jehovah, I should always pray to him to help me in anyway that I want in my life and I should never give up in life.

Sensing that the students might have belonged to different religious persuasions the researcher, had an interview with the teacher and discovered that the male student who used the name "Allah" was a Muslim, while the female student who used the name "Jehovah" was a member of the Jehovah's Witness church where God was always referred to as such.

What was interesting about these extracts was that, even though it was obvious that one student copied the work of another, both were mindful of self or of their own beliefs and convictions about how sentences should be constructed, to effect the necessary changes.

Below are further samples of paragraphs from essays of students in the business class that reflect Ede's 1987 situational view of voice. Here, their educational background also shapes the students' essays:

SAMPLE 1:

My dream is to become a big time intrepreneur aside my profession, managing my own business, taking risk for myself and other staffs. My main aim of setting up the business is to create employment for the youth hence reduce unemployment and social vices as well because the youth get involved in social vices when they are unemployed. Also, my aim is to increase the standard of living of people by providing income and good working condition for employees for their services rendered

Further more, I want to produce goods and services to meet the demand of consumers at affordable prices in order to reduce the persistent increase in prices of commodities. The business is going to be a business unit into the production of consumer goods, thus goods that will be meant for direct consumption. Therefore will try to produce goods to comfort to the standard required by consumers.

SAMPLE 2:

one major measure for me to put up in pursuit of excellent is improvement in academic performance . There is the need for me to increase in my learning capacity...

SAMPLE 3:

Firstly when individuals helps to patronize in made in Ghana goods, they are classified as excellent people. This is because they helps in the development of the country. Thus it enables the government to get more revenue by imposing direct tax on good produced. This is where government get money for most of the developmental projects through the pursuit of excellent for patronizing of Ghana.

SAMPLE 4

To attain excellence, I must be well-trained morally, academically and socially, to be able to fit into any society. Education and training will apparently shape one's character, human relations, skills acquisition which leads to job placement and eventually improve my standard of living.

Though these samples make use of technical language, they are replete with sentence-level errors. These students made use of the language of their new discourse community in their English class. Thus, given the opportunity, and the right environment for developing texts autonomously, students are likely to, through a scaffolding approach, gain more confidence in using more appropriate language to develop voice. Unfortunately, as observed by Muchiri (1996), the apprenticeship approach employed in developing countries is the cause of 'rote learning and the reproduction of facts in examinations' (p.133) Since, enough opportunities to develop language skills have not been provided in, and out of class.

Again, task–based activities that encourage conversational negotiations (Hardy and Moore 2004), will be useful in class since they help learners engage in tasks that are designed to encourage negotiation of meaning, with the aim of recognizing and using appropriate language forms of the target language, and making conversational adjustments that enable participants to understand unfamiliar forms. Tasks, if carefully designed should introduce comprehensible input for the purpose of improving language skills of the learners.

CONCLUSION

IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

The communication strategies of these students who came from middle to low-income communities seemed to have an effect on teaching and learning. Most of the students who failed to submit their assignments to the class teacher on or before the deadline, explained that school was the only place where they could study, since the conditions at home were simply not conducive to learning; for they had shared responsibilities to ensure that the family survived under the harsh prevailing conditions: they had to help the family by petty trading or by taking care of the home while their parents went out to work. For these students, home practice was easily transferred to classroom tasks as a survival strategy. Those who allowed friends to copy their work were probably lending incapable members a helping hand – something they usually did at home. The more individualistic approach to learning independently to assert self, was not evident in this study. Rather, these students tended to focus on the immediate 'survival' needs of members of the school or home 'family', and offered assistance.

Unlike research in contrastive rhetoric, this study did not view the English Language situation as a cultural one. It did not even purport to view all students in the classes observed as totally dependent

on one another. Rather, it established how a group of learners, lacking in language abilities, exhibit their propensity to draw on a variety of influences and interactions, rather than relying on their own selves to develop an essay (Foucault 1980). Even though teaching in schools with limited resources, and teaching students with low proficiency levels largely due to their limited exposure might be challenging for the teacher, the research revealed that the students were capable of drawing on features of language used in their immediate environs to create text.

By extension, one can conclude that a teaching method that continuously reflects 'safe-talk' – a face-saving strategy, that unfortunately prevents less proficient students from practicing language skills they so badly need, (Chick 1996). Rather, it only nurtures a dependency culture that encourages weaker students to rely on more proficient members. If the classroom is where students learn to communicate in English, opportunity must be given to as many students as possible to learn and share ideas in the target language; otherwise, the writing of final year students, as revealed in this study, will remain at a level that does not reflect the needed results from years of tuition in English.

The concepts of 'face' and self-effacement make collaborative learning strategies useful for creating a relatively stress-free environment. However, absolute reliance on group-work and teacher-generated outlines for essays during the pre-writing stage of the writing process has the tendency to conceal writing problems of individuals that must be taken care of by the teacher.

Equity pedagogy, which increases and varies student participation in class may work well with such learners who need to be provided environments that value their different abilities (Brooks 2004; Tomlinson 2002; Latham 2001; Guild 2001; Davis *et al.* 2000). What this paper has revealed is that, teachers must treat students as individuals who are, on their own, capable of drawing on varied cultural resources to create text. And this, if properly managed, as a starting point, must direct teaching towards helping each student to achieve his or her full potential.

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