

Teaching Vietnamese Writing to Foreigners With Interactive Viewpoints

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Abstract—Interactive communication is a key feature of the information age. Forms of communication that were thought to be one-way, such as television and book, becoming interactive along with the growth of digital, mobile devices, Internet, computers. Developed technology and updated media have created more chances for interactive communication throughout social classes, media, disciplines, cultures, places and also times. Pedagogically, writing has been increasingly perceived as inherently social and interactive. It involves more than just creating, organizing, translating ideas into texts. Basically, each act of writing is an interactive phase, ideally manifesting as intertextuality, with a particular academic establishment or discipline represented by its specific foundations, problems, and precursors. For those motivations, we have researched the application of interactive viewpoints into teaching Vietnamese writing for foreign students. Within this, we clarify the concept of interactive writing, propose techniques for teaching, criteria for assessing the interactive Vietnamese writing skills of foreign students, to apply in the teaching process and in testing and assessing activities. The results also have the prospects for developing interactive Vietnamese writing textbooks for foreigners as well as criteria for assessing the interactive Vietnamese writing competency tests.

Index Terms—interactive, interactive communication, interactive writing, interactive writing techniques, criteria for assessing interactive writing skills

I. INTRODUCTION

In social interaction theories of discourse, meaning is a social construction dealt by writers and readers via textual means, which distinctively shapes their corresponding goals. While communicating, the writer and the reader can have lots of actions, aimed at achieving developing and continuous "statuses" of mutual understanding. Attention and research in everyday conversations (Staton et al., 1988) and collaborative writing groups (Gere & Stevens, 1985) vividly reinforce the view that writing is a process of interactions between writers and their readers. Increasingly, the nature of writing, in all languages, is seen as inherently interactive and social. Theorists of writing acknowledge that writing requires higher than just creating, organizing, or transferring thinkings into text. Essentially, every action of writing implies an interactive phase, preferably embodying intertextuality (Porter, 1986).

Therefore, in this article, we present research on applying interactive writing perspectives to teaching interactive Vietnamese writing to foreigners and related issues. Specifically, we study issues related to interactive writing such as concepts, elements, teaching methods, structure of requirements, assessment criteria, assessment standards for the interactive Vietnamese writing competency of foreigners. We conduct research starting from surveying research works on interactive writing in the world and in Vietnam, interactive writing tests in English and Vietnamese, and then with those results we apply in teaching Vietnamese writing to foreigners. The results obtained from this study include the defined interactive writing concept, interactive writing criteria, teaching methods, requirements structure, assessment criteria, and assessment standards, directions for composing interactive Vietnamese writing textbooks for foreigners.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Regarding the concept of interactive / interaction, in the 1980s - 1990s, there were many studies in Australia, UK and USA on interaction in the classroom. Specifically, Douglas et al. have been dominant in promoting adjacent attention to language role in interaction within groups. At that point of time, the concept of students being helped by teachers, urged to create knowledge for themselves showed a special pedagogical perspective (Bearne, 2003).

The interactive approach "holds that language learning occurs in and through participation in speech events, that is, that talking to others, or making conversation is essential" (van Lier, 1988, p.74). This approach is rooted in Long's (1985) interaction hypothesis: "the dynamic nature of the interplay between learners and their peers and their teachers and others with whom they interact" (Brown, 2007, p.304) and sees it as the proposition that "any learning that takes place in the classroom arises in the course of interaction of these players" (Ellis, 1987, p.191).

Regarding the concept of interactive communication, it is a modern term, a key feature of the current information age. Various means of communication that were formerly considered to be one-way, such as TV or book, becoming

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interactive along with the growth of Internet, computers, mobile and digital gadgets. Developed technology and latest media have instantly soared the chances for interactive communicating throughout social classes, media, disciplines, cultures, places and also the time. Forms of interactive communication include basic dialogue and non-verbal communication, game books, interactive novel-story, hypertext, interactive television-movie, video sharing, video games, social media, marketing and public relations, augmented reality, ambient intelligence, and virtual reality (en.wikipedia).

According to researchers, the concept of interactive writing originated from language experience approach (Ashton-Warner, 1963) and shared writing of McKenzie's (1985). In those thoughts, teacher acts as the secretary for oral expressions of students' to denote the operation of transforming speech to language written which can be read as a seductive and understandable text.

Cognitive and sociocultural theories of learning set foundations for interactive writing (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wertsch, 1998; Clay, 2001). Processes of cognition are formed and evolved in activities of writing built by teachers and students with socio-cultural nature. The purpose of interactive writing is to help students understand the meaning of writing. Lessons are directional; teachers model what students must do during independent writing. The lesson begins with the teacher and student collaborating to plan the text to be written, often editing the message spoken many times. Then, teacher and student "share the pen" (McCarrier et al., 2000, p. xvii).

In the classroom, teachers use interactive writing to model reading and writing strategies as they encourage students to create texts. Interactive writing allows teachers and students to literally "share the pen" to create a common sentence or message. Interactive writing is a dynamic educational vehicle for the teaching of spelling principles, phonics, syllables, pattern, and various important writing skills at early stages. This interactive writing approach is described in great detail in the work named "Interactive Writing: How Language & Literacy Come Together" by McCarrier et al. (2000).

Thus, "Interactive writing provides a means for teachers to engage in effective literacy instruction, not through isolated skills lessons, but within the framework of constructing texts filled with personal and collective meaning" (Button et al., 1996, p.446).

Regarding interactive writing methods, they have been described in many works such as: *Students and Teachers Writing Together: Perspectives on Journal Writing* (Peyton, 1990), *Some day you will no all about me: Young Children's Explorations in the World of Letter Writing* (Robinson et al., 1990), etc.

In the interactive approach, teachers act as facilitators to engage students in "task oriented", "purposeful" and "collaborative" learning (cooperative) (Rivers 1987, p.10). Learners are not passive observers, but in fact, active and responsible participants in the learning process.

Regarding studies in Vietnamese, although there have been many research works related to teaching Vietnamese writing to foreigners such as teaching writing from sentence, teaching writing using 5W + 1H questions, teaching grammar – writing, teaching writing using mind maps, teaching writing with communication method, etc. However, we have not found a single work that has studied and applied interactive methods to teaching writing. Therefore, in this study, we will refer to the strengths and weaknesses of the existing works in Vietnam, and at the same time apply the experience of teaching interactive writing abroad to propose interactive Vietnamese writing techniques as well as assessment criteria for students' interactive writing skills.

Through the research works, a definition of interactive writing can be summarized as follows. Interactive writing is the process by which writers and readers interact with reciprocal and correspondent roles in creating written discourse with each other. That process involves five basic elements: negotiating the composition of the text; secondly, collaborating in the development of the text; thirdly, using textual conventions; and then reading and rereading the text; and finally, searching, checking, and validating while reading and writing.

III. TEACHING VIETNAMESE WRITING SKILLS WITH INTERACTIVE PERSPECTIVE

A. *Interactive Criteria for Vietnamese Writing Skills*

Regarding interactive writing guidance, many studies around the world have been done and attested (Brotherton & Williams, 2002; Craig, 2006; Hall et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2010; Williams & Lundstrom, 2007; Williams, 2011; Williams et al., 2012; Roth & Guinee, 2011). From the research and definitions of interactive writing, we can draw the interactive criteria for Vietnamese writing skills including the following.

1) The first is interchangeability. Interchangeability is one of the foundations of the interactive, social aspect of language. Writing is an activity used in the social interaction of language. Therefore, interaction in writing must be able to communicate. If there is no communication, then the writing is not interactive.

2) Secondly, interactive writing is a two-way process, with feedback alternating between writers and readers. For example, during interactive writing, students and teachers discuss about what they are going to write. The teacher acts as a facilitator of the discussion - guiding, modeling, supplementing, summarizing, validating, combining, and synthesizing student ideas. Interactive writing is a continuous process of interaction between writers and readers. Readers receive message and give response back to writers. Feedback from the writers will then affect the reader's comprehension and trigger more feedback, possibly eliciting more opinions given by the writers. In terms of theory, the

interaction sequences can be from very simple to rather complicated, relating to different elements consisting of the language level of proficiency of the partakers, differences in social position, acquaintanceship between them, each person's knowledge, the complexity of the message, the nature of the interaction, etc.

3) The third is the communication situation. Interactive writing must take place in a communicative situation. Readers and writers together participate in specific communication situations, interact continuously with each other. If there is no communicative situation, then it is not interactive writing but passive writing or non-communicative writing.

4) The next criterion is problem solving. In interactive writing, communication problems occur, and problem solving is necessary to achieve the ultimate interactive goal. These problems may include discussing topics and writing processes, dealing with text conventions and be of grammar, spelling, punctuation, lettering, phonetics and intonation or styles and ways of writing for different purposes. The problems in the interactive writing process are the teaching content that the teacher wants to aim at and train the students.

5) Next is the criterion of goal completion. When writers actively interact by continuously providing feedback, taking turns, and negotiating meaning with the readers, they are actually collaborating with the readers to progress the discourse and ultimately accomplish the goal of communication. This communication goal is the biggest goal of the series of interactive activities in the writing process.

6) The last criterion is the writer-reader relationship. The relationship between the writers and the readers means that between them there must always be collaboration, cooperation, reciprocity, and working together. This represents the nature of interaction in writing because research has empirically demonstrated that the essence of interactive writing is collaboration. The meanings of discourses are constructed collaboratively by writers and readers in interactive contexts. They actively collaborate with each other to increase their mutual understanding (Staton et al., 1988) (Gere & Stevens, 1985).

B. Techniques for Teaching Interactive Vietnamese Writing to Achieve the Above Criteria

From the interaction criteria identified above, when teaching interactive Vietnamese writing to foreigners, teachers need to base on those criteria to consider the following issues when constructing activities of interactive writing for students.

1) Create an interchangeable social situation. As analyzed above, writing activities in real social interaction are activities with communication situations such as writing letters, e-mails, ordering, applying for jobs, chatting online, text messaging, social networking, etc. When creating social communication situations, it is also necessary to pay attention to the ability to communicate because the ability to communicate is the door to interactive activities. If the ability to communicate is lost, then writing is no longer interactive, and that writing activity falls outside the goal of social communication.

2) Ensure the bidirectionality of interactions. The most basic nature of interaction in social communication is the two-way nature in the most dynamic sense. One-way impacts will not be considered interactions. Therefore, interactive writing activities must always ensure the bidirectionality of interactions. For example, if you only answer the questions asked, it is considered to have a one-way impact and this writing activity is not interactive yet. Here, the alternation of readers - writers must always be monitored and ensure the positive in two-way interactions.

3) Create communication problems for writers to solve. During the interactive process of the writing activity, communication problems will arise and the students must deal with and find ways to solve all of those communication problems through specific interactions with purposes to accomplish the goal of the interactive writing activity. Communication problems are also the teaching goals that teachers want to integrate for students to train and practice in the interactive process of writing activities.

4) Provide social communication goals for the writers to accomplish. Each interactive writing activity must be geared towards a specific social communication goal. Those are practical goals that the writers encounter in social life reality. It is a motivation, a goal and a joy for students in their interactive writing process.

5) Monitor the alternate writer-reader relationship. In their role, teachers need to supervise the alternate writer-reader relationship. This monitoring is to ensure that the writing activity has meaningful and positive interaction. It is also not beyond the purpose of helping learners achieve true social writing ability, eliminating forms of coping in writing or writing like a machine that cannot accomplish the goal of social communication.

C. Methods for Assessing Vietnamese Writing Skills With Interactive Point of View

Accurate student assessment across all aspects of language competence remains an area that needs to be researched more. One of the options is to create chances for students to come up with their general score by self-assessment and cross-assessment (van Lier, 1988). Rivers (1987) suggested tests being "interesting and absorbing" and students "mentally interacting with the test writer or administrator or with other students..." (p. 13). An additional choice is to focus more on assessing classroom activities than on end-of-term exams. This can make students more focused on daily activities rather than cramming for tests (Rivers, 1987).

Regardless of the point of view of the assessment of students' interactive writing ability, when performing this test and assessment, the main features of the interactive writing task using the target language (TLU: Target Language Use) needs to be considered comprehensively. The TLU interactive writing task involves the following elements.

1) Writer's feedback: Every interactive writing task should have standards for the amount and level of writer response because feedback is an inevitable premise of interaction. Without feedback, there can be no interaction.

2) Writer's interaction ability: Interaction ability is the core competence of the writing activity. Writers must demonstrate their meaningful, goal-oriented interaction ability at a certain frequency depending on the requirements of each specific interactive writing task.

3) The writer's ability to solve communication problems: In each interactive writing task, language and communication issues are integrated for students to handle and practice. Therefore, assessing the level of problem solving of students is essential to assess students' interactive writing ability.

4) The writer's ability to accomplish communication goals: Not any interactive writing task is an exception to writer's social communication goals. Therefore, the ability of the writer to accomplish the communication goals is also an important factor to evaluate the interactive writing ability of the students.

5) Ability to maintain writer-reader relationship: This is also a skill and ability to perform social interaction of students. Once this relationship is absent or no longer maintained, the interaction possibility will also be lost. Assessing the ability to maintain a writer-reader relationship is also an assessment of students' interactive writing ability.

IV. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first is teaching Vietnamese writing. The writing practice exercises in the current textbooks used to teach Vietnamese to foreigners are mostly informational writing. That is, most of the exercises are aimed at intrinsic language skills, in which the focus is on information content with little or no attention to the interactive aspect of social communication. Here is an example:

Thực hành viết: (Writing practice)

Với tư cách là một nhà bảo vệ môi trường, bạn hãy cho biết ý kiến về hiện tượng trái đất ấm lên. (As an environment protector, please give your opinion about the phenomenon of global warming.)

With this type of writing task, in terms of training of the intrinsic language skills, it can be good. However, in terms of interaction and social communication, it can be said that these aspects are absent. Instead, we can apply a variety of ways to make writing interactive as shown in some of the following examples.

Phỏng vấn và viết: (Interview and write)

Với tư cách là một nhà bảo vệ môi trường, bạn hãy phỏng vấn các ý kiến và viết về hiện tượng trái đất ấm lên. (As an environment protector, please interview for opinions and write about the phenomenon of global warming.)

About the interactive activity of interviewing and writing, students interview their partners and write an article, a CV, a cover letter, etc. Then the interviewees read the text to check the facts and see if they want to add anything or not. It is also possible to have several people write the same interview and compare their completed paragraphs. For more fun, ask the interviewers not to take notes until they get home, then stay home to write from memory and thus, there will be more inaccuracies to spot and correct.

Other forms of interactive writing activities can be Write about each other, Write and guess who that person is, Read and write, Write blog, Create a forum, Write interactive instructions, etc.

The second is the assessment of Vietnamese writing competence. The assessment of Vietnamese writing competence in writing exams and tests currently does not pay attention to students' ability to interact and communicate while writing. The writing task questions focus solely on the linguistic and technical content of the text. There are no criteria for interactive writing in the framework of the assessment of writing competence. All the criteria revolve around testing the ability to write sentences, paragraphs, texts with different technical levels in the content of the written message itself. For example, we can consider the following example.

Thực hành viết: (Writing practice)

Các anh chị hãy viết về vai trò và những ảnh hưởng của Internet với cuộc sống của chúng ta ngày nay. (Now you write about the role and effects of the Internet in our lives today.)

With this type of writing task, it is clearly that it is aimed at testing learners' knowledge of language and writing techniques through the content of the text. It completely does not create opportunities for learners to interact socially and therefore, cannot test and assess students' ability to interact in social communication. Because, for successful social communication, knowledge is only one part, the rest is social interaction competence, which includes two components: attitude and interaction skills.

The third is the issuing of Vietnamese writing proficiency test. Vietnamese writing proficiency tests so far have not tested candidates' interactive ability in writing because there are no criteria for interactive writing and therefore, of course, there are no standards and scales to assess students' interactive writing competence.

With the test tasks such as Dictation, Fill in the blanks, Write by topics, etc. there are obviously no interactive elements. Even for the task of writing a response to a given letter/ e-mail, according to the interactive criteria for writing activity, this response task is not yet qualified to be interactive because it is only a one-way feedback, there is no possibility of interchangeability, and writer-reader relationship is not maintained.

Therefore, in the process of making the Vietnamese writing proficiency test, the aspect of students' interactive writing competence should be paid attention and added to the exam tasks in order to assess and test students' real communication ability when they are put into a real social communication environment. It also aims to assess the

student comprehensively, including language performance, not just knowledge, or coping with exam questions, with test-taking, and with scores, but have no or very little real performance competence.

Finally, with the compiling of interactive Vietnamese writing textbooks. The actual survey shows that textbooks of Vietnamese language teaching for foreigners can be divided into three groups. In the first group, which is currently available, there are writing assignments and tasks that have been designed with few interactive elements and interactive activities for students. In the second group, they are textbooks which do not have interactive elements. And the last group contains the textbooks that are in the process of being compiled or will be compiled in the future. With these types of textbooks, we should invest attention, construction, expansion, and enhancement of social interaction issues for learners because of the importance of the skills, competence of interactive writing that have been studied and demonstrated in the above content.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The interactive approach regards student to be an energetic contributor in the class rather than a suffering student; a method which states that language is not the only entity for studying, but also the interactive experiences that students readily interact together and make communications in a targeted language.

The interactive approaches in writing shall allow, when being applied to education, the construction of sequences of communication exchange among the participants rather than a single exchange between the teacher and individual members, and thus, ensuring more diverse interactions. Moreover, creating a mutual space of mental conception is an important point to help learners have mandatory equipment to absorb the content of the subject, and improve the quantity, quality of student's exchanges as well. Therefore, we come to a conclusion that when applying methods of interactive writing, the regular conception of education has been completely changed, as Mathieu (1998) said that teachers are no longer informants but facilitators allowing students to explore, respond, and compare at their own pace.

Within the scope of this research, we have clarified the concept of interaction, discussed the application of interactive elements into teaching Vietnamese writing skills, analyzed the structures of interactive writing requirements, and proposed techniques to teaching and learning interactive writing skills, criteria for interactive writing competency assessment, criteria for interactive writing test assessment as well as directions for compiling Interactive Vietnamese writing textbooks for foreigners.

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