

Linguistic Aspects of Writing for Professional Purposes

Greta Përgjegji PhD Candidate
Foreign Language Center, Armed Forces Academy, Training and Doctrine Command

Abstract

Writing for Professional Purposes is considered as a means of communication between professionals who belong to two communities that have different languages, but share the same knowledge or expertise. The article gives a hint on how writing for specific purposes evolved to give rise to the creation of Writing for Professional Purposes. The social, cultural and cognitive aspects are an essential part of Writing for Professional Purposes since the physical act of writing cannot be considered only a result or product of the knowledge the individual possesses but also a social and cultural act. Therefore, the social and cultural aspects of writing explains the specificities and the intricacies of the effects these aspects have on writing for it is considered as an inseparable part of social and cultural groups. On the other hand, the cognitive aspect of writing explains and emphasizes the mental activities of the individual during the decision-making process while he/she is writing planning and editing their material having in mind the audience. On the same line of reasoning, writing for professional purposes in a second language means that the writer has to consider the audience twice; first, there is an audience who shares the same knowledge or expertise and second, the audience does not have the same language. Consequently, writing in another language that is not the first language with a specific jargon as well as a specific grammatical structure brings about a lot of difficulties. Hence, writing in professional contexts in the mother tongue implies only writing in a specialized version of a language already known to the writer, but writing in a target language means that the writer has to learn the target language and the specialized version of that language.

Keywords: Writing for Professional Purposes, social and cultural aspect, mother tongue, cognitive aspect, target language, differences.

Introduction

According to Gotti (1991), “a language is considered as specific if it fulfills the following conditions: it places the emphases on the user (the didactic area), the referring reality (the field of the pragmatic function) and the use of the specialized language (the professional language area). While, Shkurtaj (2009) considers the specialized language used in a professional context closely related to the environment it is used as well as that the written communication of the institution expresses and symbolizes the social and the political authority of that institution. For these reasons, different researchers like Flanegin & Rudd (2000) or Pakir (1999) stress the importance that the English has acquired as a means of written communication in professional context because of the fact that the English language has already become a Lingua Franca throughout this globalized world. Writing for professional purposes contains a considerable number of terms that can be combined in a unique way to form fixed set expressions used and understood only by a specific professional community. Except the terms this written form of the target language involves different stylistic and grammatical sentence structures. Hence, although the writer has a considerable expertise in his profession the individual might encounter problems in putting into paper that knowledge he/she owns in a second language. The writer has to bear in mind the idea that “the writer writes from the point of view of the expert in his field and that the written piece is addressed to an audience with the same expertise, knowledge, needs and purposes as him/her” (Fridrickson & Swales, 1996). Thus, the writers address their thoughts, ideas and professionalism to a community with the same form of colloquialism and background.

1. Linguistic aspects of Writing for Professional Purposes

1.1. The social and cultural aspect

The sole physical act of writing in the majority of the cases is considered as a product of the knowledge that the writer possesses or “a product of an acquired previous knowledge” (Davidson, 2007). It is true since the individual has to write the material and nobody else is going to do that for him/her. On the other side, it is also a product of a person who is member of group with specific social and cultural values; therefore transforming it in a social and cultural act. Hamp-Lyons & Kroll (1997) consider writing for professional purposes as an activity that takes place in a certain context with the aim of achieving a special goal; it takes a specific form for a specific audience. Following the same line of thoughts, Sperling (1996) adds the idea that writing like the language in general is a meaningful activity that is culturally structured which has an individual and social purpose. Hayes (1996) widens the social concept of the writing for professional purposes by saying that:

“Writing is social because it is a social product that occurs in a social environment. What we write, the way we write, and to whom we write is formed by the social conditions as well as our history of interaction... The

genres in which we write were created by other writers and the phrases that we write often reflect the phrases that the others have used”.

For Writing for Professional Purposes occurs in a community with a unique specificity the members of this group should learn more than just vocabulary and grammar. They should study, learn and master the rhetorical forms of writing of this professional community.

Just as the social aspect is a very important part of the writing for professional purposes the cultural aspect is not of a lesser importance. Writing in a second language in this case the English language implies two different cultures (Kaplan. 1996). Different linguists like Leki (1992) notice the cultural influences on writing. They underline the concept that the cultural differences in writing are not only reflected in the structure of the ideas and thoughts but also in the cultural preferences which make use of certain options of the linguistic opportunities (Grabe & Kaplan. 1996).

These differences are directly learned through the education in the second language and not through getting exposed to the target language and culture. It is a widely shared opinion and a fact that the language reflects the culture of the country where it is spoken, which makes it the main reason why writing as one of the skills of this language receives cultural values and norms. The English language is a language with an extremely organized structure and for that reason a reader belonging to that culture expects a written material with a very structured form and content; organized in a hierarchical way with a lot of linking words and transitions used to link the words into phrases and then phrases into whole ideas. In the English culture it is very important that the professional material be written clearly without making the reader to struggle reading between the lines to understand it; while in some other languages and cultures, even though the writer leaves out certain words, the reader still understands what the writer intended to say.

In other words, if the writer and the reader belong to the same culture the reader and the writer know what to expect from each other because they have a common bond that enables the reader to decode the message. But if the writer comes from or is member of a culture that is not the English one, a native speaker will not only encounter difficulties in understanding what is written but also he or she is going to see a disorganized and a poor piece of writing. This brings to the common shared concept that writing is a social and cultural activity since it cannot happen outside the context in which is written.

1.2 The cognitive aspect

Weigle (2002) considers the ability of writing in professional contexts in a second language not only according to the perspective that writing is a social and cultural phenomenon but also according to the perspective that it is a cognitive activity. During the last decades many researchers have given a series of examples and models that writing is a product of a cognitive process. This aspect is closely related to the process approach of writing which paid emphases on the mental decision making processes that the second language writer goes through while creating meaningful messages.

Furthermore, Weigle (2002) stresses the fact that the writers should write a professional material taking into account the audience. Consequently, the writer passes a lot of time planning, drafting writing and editing the same material several times since the writer has to address the material or the document to an audience that most probably shares the same experience and expertise. Brown in his studies clearly and unequivocally links the process of writing with the process of critical thinking in his idea that “the written works are the result of critical thinking” (Brown 2001).

According to the cognitive aspect of writing it is crucial that the writer in all the cases create equilibrium between the whole process of writing and the final product of this process taking into account every single social, cultural, and literary aspect of the target language he is writing. In order to write a piece in which nothing is left to the case the individual has to explore the target language and culture by using more “authentic written materials” (Brown, 2001) as an example.

2. Linguistic differences between Writing for Professional Purposes in first and target language

Since the ability of writing in a second language and especially writing in the English language in today’s society has become a pivotal tool for the communication between the individuals of different cultures in different professional fields like business, law, medicine and military the role of teaching and learning this ability is intermittently increasing. Writing is difficult in both the two languages the mother tongue and the target one. In the mother tongue, writing is closely linked with the formal education of the individual since in terms of knowing the language the individual already knows it even before starting school.

Therefore, in such a case, the individual has to learn only the ability of writing. Furthermore, writing in paragraph or essay level is something that this individual will rarely use outside his or her area of studies or professional environment. This, leads to the idea that writing in the mother tongue is uniquely destined to those individuals that have a specialized career in education business, medicine, law, military etc... Grabowski (1996) says that “writing compared to speaking, can be seen as a more standardized system which should be learned

through a specialized instruction”

Thus, writing for professional purposes in the mother tongue involves writing in a specialized version of language already known to the individual. This specialized variety of the language has a totally different structure from the spoken one; however these speaking and the writing abilities are built upon already known sources that the individual or the student possesses. On the other hand, if we take into account the second language, the individual does not have an already know source. Consequently, writing for professional purposes in the target language becomes an ever harder task to accomplish for the unique reason that someone cannot write even a single sentence if the individual does not possess some basic grammatical rules of that language.

Another reason why writing for professional purposes in the English language is intricate is the linguistic structure that the second language owns. If the target language has a similar structure to the first language structure the individual might not find it so challenging, but if the language structure is completely different, then this process becomes challenging.

Writing for professional purposes in the first language and that in the target language differs in many aspects. When the individual or the writer makes the effort of writing in a second language makes use of a myriad of sources and the processes of the writing in the first language; as a result transferring the ability of writing from one language into the other. Nevertheless, owing to the writer’s limitations in knowledge in the target language, writing in the foreign language might lack something or it might be hampered by the need to focus on the language and not the content. Target language writing has the tendency to be less effective since the individuals do not plan or follow the writing process stages. Furthermore, regarding the content the writers edit the written material less, and write less fluently and accurately than they do in the mother tongue.

The process of text production or the process of inner ideas creation in a written material might be negatively influenced by the long and uninterrupted search for a suitable academic or professional vocabulary, or the right lexical and syntactical choices. Acting so, the end result of the written material might not fulfill the initial aim or purpose of the writer.

Lastly, another fact for the limited language sources of the target languages writers is that the writer is in disadvantage because of the social and cultural factors related to writing (Kaplan, 1996). The second language writers of professional materials might not be fully aware of the social and cultural uses of writing for professional purposes in the target language, the most appropriate ways and the approaches to put into paper different functions or what a reader belonging to the other culture expects from the written piece.

Conclusion

Writing for professional purposes plays an important role in the communication of the message which transforms it in a pivotal process since different professional fields besides the specific terminology or inseparable word units have a language with a specialized subject and a unique stylistic sentence structure. Considering the terminology, the specific jargon, the combination among words and the fact that writing for professional purposes is addressed to an audience with the same expertise as the writer, it might result in a challenging task to accomplish. As mentioned above professional writing is difficult in the first language and the target language as well. However, it is worth mentioning that writing it in the second language is even more intricate, for the simple fact that the writer in the mother tongue knows the stylistic and grammatical structures of the language as well as the its social and cultural aspects; while in the second language the author not only does not know the stylistic and grammatical structures in the same degree as those of his first language, but also he does not know or at least he is not fully aware of the social and cultural aspects of writing in the target language. Under such circumstances writing cannot be considered a result of the knowledge this individual possesses. It has to be a social and cultural act for it happens in a specific context since the language reflects the culture of the country it is spoken and in this case the professional environment it takes place. Hence, writing in a language acquires cultural values and norms; as a result, a written piece cannot be evaluated outside the context it is initially written.

References

- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy – 2nd Edition*. New York: Longman pg 335, 337-360
- Cushing Weigle, S. (2002). *Assessing writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pg 14, 22, 23
- Davidson, C., 2007. 'Independent writing in current approaches to writing instruction: What have we overlooked?' *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, [e-journal] 6 (1), pg. 11-24.
- Flanegin & Rudd (2000); *Integrating communication skills and business education; Teaching for tomorrow*, *Journal of business education*, I, Proceedings 2000,
- Fridrickson, K & Swales, J.M (1996) *Text and Talk in Professional contexts* Association Svedese de Linguistique Appliquee ASSLA Uppsala pg 9-22
- Grabe, W. & Kaplan, R. B. (1996). *Theory and practice of writing*. New York ;Longman pg 184:

- Grabowski, J. (1996). Writing and speaking: Common grounds and differences toward a regulation theory of written language production. pg 75 (In C.M Levy and S. Randall eds) The science of writing NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Hamp-Lyons, L. & B. Kroll (1997). TOEFL 2000 - Writing: Composition, Community, and Assessment (TOEFL Monograph Series 5). Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Hayes, J. R.(1996). A new framework for understanding cognition and affect in writing. Pg 5 In C. M. Levy and S. Ransdell eds.), The science of writing . NJ:Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Kaplan, R. B. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. Language Learning 16,
- Leki, I. (1992). Understanding ESL writers. NH: Heinemann Educational Books pg 21
- Maurizio Gotti, (1991) I linguaggi specialistici, Caratteristiche linguistiche e criteri pragmatici; La nuova Italia, Firenze
- Pakir, (1999): Language in the Global Context: Implications for the Language Classroom, 19 – 21 April SEAMEO RELC, Singapore
- Shkurtaj Gjovalin, (2009) Sociolinguistikë e Shqipes bot. 2të Shtëpia botuese Morava, Tiranë Pg 186
- Sperling, M. (1996). Revisiting the writing and speaking connection: Challenges for research on writing and writing instruction. Review of Educational Research Pg 55