Audience awareness of Persian learners of English writing: Towards a model of task-oriented strategies

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Abstract

Persian learners of English often avoid attending to audience considerations, which brings them lower scores. The present study was conducted in a major university in Iran to help Persian learners develop a sense of audience awareness in writing. Thirty five Persian students of English were trained with a focus on process-oriented instruction. The intended task was a letter where student writers were asked to write to a government authority. Having submitted their first drafts, they received training on audience parameters and were asked to revise the drafts for style and audience considerations, and to resubmit the final drafts for scoring. Participants were interviewed on how they considered the reader in the written text, how they engaged the reader in the text, and what strategies they used for the task accomplishment. The interviews were analyzed qualitatively, and transcribed protocols were studied carefully, with two core categories (i.e. *linguistic* and *non-linguistic* considerations) emerging from the data. Also, participants implied attending to audience in three phases: pre-task, on-the-task, and post-task strategies. In sum, training Persian learners resulted in their enhanced awareness of strategies they can adopt for audience considerations.

Keywords: Audience engagement; EFL; Persian; training; writing instruction.

Introduction

Overview

Taught according to the conventions of each society and those of the language one is learning, writing is a skill learned consciously through schooling (Uysal, 2008). Therefore, in learning to write a second language, learners may find it difficult to attune to the rules of the L2 rhetoric because of deeply rooted L1 conventions. The basic question behind this research report originated in one such difference between English and Persian because Persian learners of English often avoid attending to audience considerations. It is often asserted that English is a writer-responsible language (Hinds, 1987) in that the writer provides the information required by the intended audience and prepares the written task through dialogic construction. However, such a tradition does not exist in Persian as from centuries ago, Persian writers wrote surreptitiously due to the historical background of the country where written material, even in the form of poetry and travel accounts, were meant to convey hidden meanings for the elite. Such a tradition has now been transferred to the contemporary generation who lives in the world of information and need to compete with other users of English language for academic and occupational positions throughout the world. Rooted in the Persian culture, this tendency in Persian learners of English, with proficiency levels equal to speakers of other western languages, is thought to bring them comparatively lower scores. However, the possibility of training cannot be denied, especially when the difference is highlighted and learners are sufficiently motivated.

The present study was conducted in a major university in Iran to help learners develop a sense of audience awareness when drafting tasks assigned in a course on Essay Writing. The paper will have a look at the literature on audience awareness and models of audience. Then the methodology of the research will be presented. Afterwards, the results of the protocol analysis will be summarized and compared with Hyland's (2001) audience awareness framework. Finally, we will move toward concluding remarks on what our study participants conceived of the different aspects of audience in their written tasks.

Audience awareness parameters

One of the many things a writer needs to consider when completing a written task is the requirements of the intended audience (Bull & Shurville, 1999); however, its importance is often overlooked (Kroll, 1999) at the expense of routinized instruction of language and mechanics of writing. Audience awareness *training*, on the other hand, may appear difficult since many writers do not find it easy to alter the *strategies* they are used to in writing (Wyllie, 1993), often preferring one set of approaches over others (Snyder, 1993). Indeed, if strategy changes can lead to success, it is expected that the new strategies adopted by an individual will render the desired output.

The existence of audience awareness in adult learners may appear controversial because EFL students are often adults, and they have had the experience of mastering their first language but whether they enjoy audience awareness in their writing or not is not well researched. Research with college

students suggests that at college level, many students lack the sociocognitive ability to imagine readers' perspective and needs (Hays et al., 1990). On the contrary, some studies report the existence of audience awareness in children. For example, Wollman-Bonilla (2001) claims that even first graders of 5-7 years old, being at the beginning stages of literacy, show signs of audience awareness. Also, Mancuso (1985) reported strong sense of audience awareness in fifth graders.

Further to this, previous research has rendered rather contradictory results on both gender and overall language ability. For instance, Hays et al. (1990) and Rafoth (1989) suggest that writing proficiency and sociocognitive development can play a role in student writers' audience awareness. However, Wollman-Bonilla (2001) rejects this view, since she found that first graders, with underdeveloped writing proficiency, were able to envision their reader's needs, concerns and objections. Also, Quick (1983) found that writers at four different levels (grades 4, 8, 12, and college level) were equally aware of audience awareness.

However, the exact nature of audience awareness differed, with older writers exhibiting more abstract audience knowledge than younger ones. On the contrary, Thompson (2001) believes that audience awareness issues can be raised at all levels of language ability. As for gender, Mancuso (1985) reports that girls used interpersonal appeals more than boys; and that girls used a wider range of request types in writing to an editor while boys' requests appeared in writing to friends and teachers. A major difference, she reports, appeared in establishing context where girls established context more than boys in writing to an unfamiliar editor but boys did so only in writing to a familiar friend or to a teacher. Also, Midgette and colleagues (2008) found that girls wrote more persuasively than boys.

Audience awareness training

Another considerable but neglected issue has been the development of audience awareness through training. The logic behind audience awareness training is the idea that novice writers do not actively get engaged in the moment-by-moment dialogue with the reader, and accordingly need training on playing a double role in the revision process – i.e. how to write for the reader what they need by anticipating their expectations, objections, and questions. In fact, playing this double role involves reading one's own written piece as the reader. This will find manifestations in the written output as the writer reconstructs and portrays the reader in the text through rhetorical choices (Hyland, 2005). Thompson (2001) also stresses 'enacting the roles of both participants' by the writer in a dialogic interaction. Also, Sato and Matsushima (2006) highlight the importance of audience awareness training because merely being told to attend to an audience cannot improve the quality of texts.

Audience across genres

The way writers conceive of their readers is chiefly genre-dependent, and may vary form context to context. In research articles, for instance, writer-reader relationships are ostensibly egalitarian (Hyland, 2002); authors of research articles address their readers as if they were one's colleagues, knowledgeable in the general area, familiar

with the discipline's forms of argument and ways of establishing truth, and possessing similar authority and influences. Another genre could be textbooks, where two distinct entities are addressed at the same time: student consumers and professionals. However, writers speak principally to students and only indirectly to colleagues as material evaluators (Bondi, 1999; Hyland, 2002). A third type can be the undergraduate final year project report with a clear audience and a relatively unambiguous writer-reader relationship. Hyland (2002) considers this genre as high stakes as it is open to rigorous assessment for an entire course, and students have to demonstrate degrees of intellectual knowledge of the field.

A fourth type of written genre, established as a social genre, is the letter, where audience can range from a friend and a beloved partner to high governmental authorities or even still higher in rank, demanding more formal styles. While letters may be considered to be cliché-type in English, L2 writers with diverse cultural background may perform variously under the impact of culturally-loaded conventions which affect their conception of writer-reader relationship. For instance, Vergaro (2004) reports that Italian business letters indicate a negative politeness strategy and tend to use expressions that in a way humble the writer and put the reader in a higher position, while English business letters are more oriented towards positive politeness through appealing to sameness from the very beginning.

Still another category of written texts is the EFL written tasks, which has not been deeply investigated. It may be conceived that students' writing (particularly EFL written tasks) are much less overtly dialogic as they are assumed to be addressed to instructors rather than real readers (Thompson, 2001). Despite the widespread agreement about the importance of audience awareness, there is no general agreement about which audience student writers should have in mind when drafting for an instructional written task (Gunel et al., 2009). However, the importance of feedback from teachers has always been stressed (see Sato & Matsushima, 2006, for example). In contrast with the teacher-as-the-reader position, Wollman-Binilla (2001) contends that teachers cannot be considered as the readers and the existence of a specific, clearly defined audience can create a more authentic situation for studying audience awareness. Also, Kirsch and Roen (1990) argue that the perceived disposition of readers can heighten a writer's audience awareness.

Writer-related studies

Writer-related studies seem to be more frequently conducted with a focus on different aspects of writers. Focusing on cultural issues, Hinds (1987) claims that English uses a writer-responsible rhetoric versus Japanese uses a reader-responsible rhetoric. Also, Valero-Garces (1996) reports the reader-responsible nature of writing in Spanish writers. It is also shown that Anglo-Americans show a preference for intimate strategies between interactants immediately at the beginning of business relationship, while Italians tend to maintain a certain distance (Vergaro, 2004). Another significant interpersonal finding in Vergaro's (2004) research is that when Italians address the reader in sales

promotion letters, they tend to use expressions that humble the writer and put the receiver in a higher position. However, English writers tend to appeal to sameness from the very beginning (Vergaro, 2004).

Other writer-related variables may include their age, gender, and level of language ability and literacy. Scholars (e.g. Wollman-Bonilla, 2001) admit that audience awareness exists in younger students. However, Quick (1983) warns that children either lack the skill to adapt writing to the readers' needs and expectations, or do not see the necessity for audience adaptation. An important issue raised by Mancuso (1985) is the student writers' previous experiences, which can be related to their writing proficiency by extension (Thompson, 2001). Proficient writers are said to anticipate the kind of information that readers might expect to find at each point in the unfolding text, and proceed by anticipating their questions about, or reactions to, what is written. Thompson (2001) explains how writers can use textual clues such as connectives (e.g. *therefore*) or predictable text patterns (e.g. *problem-solution*), in order to guide readers as to the way the interaction unfolds.

A more interesting aspect in the writer-related features of audience awareness, particularly applicable to the EFL context, can be the existence or absence of audience awareness in student writers and the idea of audience awareness training. Many assume the reader of EFL written tasks to be the teacher but this may appear too simplistic as far as the ultimate goal of instruction is concerned (i.e. preparing the students to perform real-world tasks). Learners cannot deny the importance of authentic, non-instructional and real-world tasks in future, and this bears implications for teaching theory and practice, syllabus design, testing and material development. In line with audience awareness training, Thompson (2001) claims that effective writing strikes a balance between more monologic argumentation and the more dialogic collaborative kind. Although this may require training, students respond well to the exploration of how this balance can be achieved (Thompson, 2001). Undoubtedly, the ability of writers in establishing an effective writer-reader rapport – whether egalitarian, dominant or humble – builds on the use of appropriate rhetorical choices to meet the interpersonal expectations. However, writers take almost similar strategies to serve different audience requirements at the stage of revision (Wong, 2005).

Audience engagement framework

Based on his study of the academic writing, Hyland (2001) has proposed that there are a number of devices that provide potential surface-feature evidence of reader engagement. These features include the following:

(1) Questions, both real and rhetorical; e.g. *What would you do in this situation?*
(2) Inclusive first person, indefinite, and second person pronouns and items referring to readers; e.g. *As we can see, You should consider this, etc.*
(3) Directives including imperatives, obligation modals referring to actions of the reader; e.g. *Note that, A distinction must be made between,* and adjectival predicates controlling

a complement *to*- clause; e.g. *It is important (for you the reader) to consider the distinction…*).

(4) References to shared knowledge; e.g. *As we all know*, the obvious relation between…….; and

(5) Asides addressed to the reader, marked off from the ongoing flow of text; e.g. *This – it may suggest – makes a difference …, This - to my surprise – makes a difference.*

Methods and materials

Procedure

A group of 35 Persian students of English (age ranging from 18 to 22 years) in a major university in Iran were taught by the first author on a course of Essay Writing with a focus on process-oriented instruction. However, the intended task for this study was in the form of a letter where the student writers were asked to write a letter to the Iranian Minister of Science, Research and Technology, i.e. we moved toward a genre-process approach. Following the submission of their first drafts, they received training on attending to audience parameters for a couple of sessions enriched with teacher feedback, classroom discussions, student comments and analyzing sample written tasks in class as part of this training. After that, they were asked to revise the drafts for style and audience considerations, and to resubmit the final drafts for scoring.

Topic selection

For the information of readers, Dr. Z. (*Pseudonym*) the Iranian Minister of Science, Research and Technology at the time we conducted the present research was a male PhD of around 60. The ministry governs and controls all Iranian universities except for medical universities which are governed by the Ministry of Health. The admission to universities in Iran is filtered by a nationwide national exam (*Konkoor* in Persian); normally state university seats are limited and the competition is highly motivated; state university graduates feel superior to other counterparts but there is no rule for such a distinction. However, employment opportunities are usually allotted to the former. At that year, the minister announced that they will admit remarkably more applicants to the universities. Therefore, increasing the number of university seats in that year meant an unemployment catastrophe for the graduates after a short period, as well as many other social and economic problems. Assigning a task on this topic seemed to motivate the participants in our study to write effectively.

We decided to provide the learners with a topic of high social concern in the native society. A curious topic for the university students in Iran is the decisions made by the ministry governing the universities and other ministries formulating rules of employment and life supporting organizations. In 2007, the Ministry announced that for the next educational year, there would be more university seats than the previous years. Normally, one out of 5 used to get admitted to state universities, and the rest had to choose *Azad* (Persian word for the Open University), *Payame-Noor* (Persian word for the University of Distance Learning), *Non-Profit* or other institutes. However, the announcement stated that 90% of the applicants could enter state universities in that year. This decision caused a lot of worry among the university students and

lowered their motivation to follow the learning route in courses; there were Students Union objections in the form of rallies and strike at universities. The topic in Appendix 1 was felt to trigger such emotions to enrich a persuasive writing addressed to a specified reader, i.e. the minister. Although the intended reader was artificially selected to be the minister, during the training, they were requested to consider the reader to be original and the training was somewhat successful, evidenced by the interview contents.

Data Collection

The results of the present paper are not based on the scores; rather, we interviewed the participants on how they considered the reader in the written text, how they engaged the reader in the text, and what strategies they used for the task accomplishment. The interviews were conducted in their native language because this was considered as enriching the elicited answers. The questions of the interview are presented in Appendix 2. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and double checked for the accuracy of protocols. They were typed and checked for the accuracy of typing too.

Data analysis

For the analysis, a grounded theory approach was adopted. In other words, the obtained protocols were coded in three levels of open, axial and selective coding. In other words, the information was analyzed through the application of open coding techniques, or line-by-line analysis (looking for words and sentences in the text bearing some meaning), which helped to identify provisional explanatory concepts and categories. These concepts and categories were then enriched, modified and verified in the transcribed protocols of other participants. The primary goals of open coding are to conceptualize and categorize data, achieved through two basic analytic procedures: making comparisons and asking questions. This type of coding begins the process of labeling many individual phenomena. In time, a number of individually labeled concepts are clustered around a related theme. The individual concepts are gathered together to form more powerful and abstract categories. Once categories are formed in open coding, they are fleshed out in terms of their given properties and dimensions. The properties are "characteristics of a category, the delineation of which defines and gives it meaning" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). Dimensions illustrate how each property can vary along a continuum. Open coding is achieved by examining the transcripts by line, by sentence, or by paragraph, and sometimes by eyeballing the entire document.

Axial coding, the second stage, is the process of relating categories to their subcategories . . . linking a category at the level of properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). A coding paradigm involving conditions, actions and interactions, and consequences actualizes this process. The focus of axial coding is to create a model that details the specific conditions that give rise to a phenomenon's occurrence. In axial coding, four analytical processes occur:

a) Continually relating subcategories to a category,

b) Comparing categories with the collected data,
c) Expanding the density of the categories by detailing their properties and dimensions, and
d) Exploring variations in the phenomena.

The final stage of data analysis in grounded theory is selective coding, which builds upon the foundation of the previous coding efforts. Selective coding is "the process of selecting the central or core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 116). Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that this central or core category should have the analytic power to "pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole" (p. 146).

Results

The transcribed protocols were studied carefully three times at least (and many times in cases) to look for recurrent patterns. Reference to participants in the study is given in parenthesized numbers (e.g. p33; 'p' standing for the *participant*) for anonymity. However, it should be reminded at the beginning that these are provided as examples, and do not necessarily mean the frequency of the relevant strategy.

Labeling individual phenomena occurs in the first stage where individually labeled concepts are clustered around a related theme, and the individual concepts are gathered together to form more powerful and abstract categories. In the second stage, we attempted to relate categories to their subcategories and to link a category at the level of properties and dimensions. Finally, two core categories (i.e. *linguistic* and *non-linguistic* considerations) were systematically related to other categories. These core categories pulled the other categories together to form an explanatory whole.

Linguistic considerations

Language

It is quite reasonable that the way we communicate with different readers affects our language options too. In the words of our participants, it was evident that most of them avoided contracted forms (e.g. *doesn't* or *isn't*) and short informal sentences (p26); instead, many of them looked for expressions suitable for communication with a high position government authority to minimize the probability of misunderstanding (p4). Almost all participants stressed the need for formal and respectful expressions, lexis and structures (p13); some referred to dictionaries to check the labels of the words (i.e. *formal, informal, derogatory*, etc.) they carefully selected (p23). All participants preferred to address the minister through suitable structures both in the beginning of the letter (e.g. *Dear Dr. Z*) and through in-line addressing (e.g. *As you know, Dr. Z.*, …). In many cases, participants used questions, both real and rhetorical (p20), both direct and indirect (p7). Also, pronouns were often used as a sign of interaction between the writer and reader in dialogic structures such as *I appreciate your concern*…, and to refer to the shared knowledge between the reader and the writer, e.g. *As we all / you know*….

Style

Participants expressed their attitude in selecting a more formal and polite style in writing to a high position in government by avoiding complexity of content, lengthy writings (p7) and occluded and ambiguous content (p33). Instead, they preferred a short letter type communication (p17); they also drafted more carefully, choosing to be concise, assertive and outspoken (p5); some opted for a simple and fluent style to avoid complexity (p8). The generally accepted style among the participants was a formal and polite type moving towards simplicity and strength.

Tone

The tone of the writer came up to be very important in the words of participants. While they avoided sarcastic tones (e.g. p9) and being rude (p1), they were mostly critical but respectful, and expressed their discontent. For instance, p24 viewed the problem realistically, and others treated the reader as if he will be willing to reply (p30). All in all, they adopted a respectful but critical tone.

The formation of thesis statement

The existence of a *topic sentence* in a paragraph and a *thesis statement* in the whole text were conceived to be an example of the writer's concern of the audience. Topic sentences and thesis statements are in fact hooks to which we attach our arguments, evidence and examples to support the main idea. Readers need to recognize and grasp such sentences easily so that they follow the line of argumentation and organization. Therefore, we asked the participants' attitude to developing such guiding sentences to readers. Interestingly, some of them had already constructed thesis statements in their written task because 'the instructor considered it as important' (p2), because 'it was important' (p32), and because 'it was important for the participant as well as being the core of his words' (p22). Some of them produced the thesis statement early at the beginning of the text, in the first paragraph, or in the last paragraph. However, there were participants who could not have made such a sentence initially in their tasks because 'she had forgotten as she often postponed writing thesis statements to the end of the task' (p13), or 'did so on the advice of the instructor in classroom discussions' (p11). Some of them even could not have managed producing thesis statements because they did not consider it as important (p1), or 'put it in the second paragraph and displaced it in the first paragraph after consulting the teacher feedback' (p7). Some paraphrased the thesis statements in the revision stage (p19), or refined a better and effective sentence in the last draft (p18).

In sum, all participants came to the understanding that the existence of a thesis statement in their texts can provide a clear account of the text for the reader. All in all, short but effective topic sentences and thesis statements were desired in the words of participants.

Non-linguistic considerations

Playing double roles

For most participants, reading one's own text, initially, meant *revising* them until it was clarified in classroom discussion, and

the participants came to agreement that the possibility of playing a double role (the role of the writer and the reader) is not out of reach. However, those who could not have practiced it had their own reasons (or excuses). For instance, the main reason was that the task was not authentic (p25), or the majority had developed a false concept of playing double roles because they felt that it just meant *reading as the reader* for editing and revising purposes. Some of the less diligent participants forgot the issue in their last draft; some did not take it serious. Some could not imagine the minister reading it; rather, they read it as a general reader. Although these participants were not successful in playing the role of the minister, they felt the task had been effectively done because in preparing the task they had been careful and convincing (p16). However, a less frequent case occurred when the interviewee was trying to convince the interviewer (the instructor of the course and the rater of the tasks at the same time) that she had played the role of the minister at the revision stage but after a challenge of ideas, she admitted that what was done has been only her own revisions rather than playing double roles (p21, p28).

On the contrary, those following the classroom discussions found interesting outcomes in their tasks. Some were satisfied with the texts and felt that the minister liked the idea, and that the minister would read the whole letter to the end and would revise the decision. For P17, the result was that the letter was quite convincing for the minister. P30 had found that the letter was too long and the minister might not have the time to read the whole letter, so she shortened the letter to a reasonable size. P30 had found that the tone was sarcastic and may insult the reader; p31 had found some of his arguments absurd for the minister; they both made a substantial change to the content of their letters afterwards.

Interactiveness

The idea of playing double roles for two participants (p20 and p11) developed in the form of *online* playing double roles. In other words, p11 played the role of the reader concurrently when she was drafting and felt the presence of the minister in the moment-by-moment preparation of the letter. For her, there was no sense in doing the same after the task was finished. P20 did almost the same and conceived a reaction on the part of the reader when he presented an idea or an argument (particularly against the decision); he mainly tried to make a mental picture of what the minister would say or react against his words. Both of them (p20, and p11) refrained from playing double roles after the letter was ready to submit.

Expecting the reader to reply

Although the task was not authentic in the sense that the minister was not obliged to read the letters, some student writers said that they expected the minister to answer because the letter had been well prepared and strongly reasonable. However, some doubted if the minister would read it at all; some believed that every suggestion would make sense to the minister and he may apply their 'solution to the problem' (p14). On the contrary, some did not expect a reply since they were totally hopeless that the minister had the time to read it, and even if he had the time to read he might be reluctant to reply a student's letter. A general feeling was that the government authorities are

never eager to communicate with people let alone to reply a letter. But p35 believed that a young minister would have been more likely to respond than an old one (the minister in question is around 60).

Objections from the Reader

The feeling that what a writer writes would cause the reader's objection in one way or another was not inconceivable for the participants. For example, p3 expressed that this might happen as he had been too critical in the third paragraph. However, the majority did not have such a feeling because they knew that the reader was not in fact the minister, and the task specified the minister as the reader for practice purposes. Also, some believed that when expressing opinions you need not be worried about the reactions of the reader (p15), especially when it is respectfully expressed (p34), logical (p29), and not political (p27). P24 believed that when you express your opinion, it is not important if the reader is resented because these days, people express themselves and authorities barely ever care about the suggested ideas.

Asserted requests directed to the reader

To make sure that the writers had imagined the presence of the audience in their task, a question was put forward on the writer's asserted request directed to the reader as a sign of completing their dialogic interaction. Some had done so in the last paragraph (e.g. p22) or the last sentence (p26) and had expressed their dislike toward the decision (e.g. p19) or had requested a revision to the decision rather than total disagreement (p12). On the contrary, those who failed to put forward a direct request said that the request was in a general form of discontent rather than disagreement (p11), or *indirectly* expressed their desire for being respectful (p10). In one case, the request was totally abandoned in favor of being dissatisfied not expecting an action on the part of the reader. In fact, requestive speech act was frequent in the letters where the participants asked the minister to take action for either revising or stopping the decision.

Discussion

The present study was conducted to help Persian learners of English develop a sense of audience awareness when drafting for writing tasks. Models of audience awareness and engagement are already proposed but some are based on data from research articles (Hyland, 2001) or business promotion letters (Vergaro, 2004). The significance of the research reported here lies in the fact that it focuses on the participants' verbal protocols, the results of which were presented in the previous section. Like Japanese and Spanish, Persian rhetoric is mainly of a reader-responsible nature; consequently, Persian learners often transfer this mode to English writing. However, through training, they were given the opportunity to practice on how to engage the reader in the text. While attending to audience can happen at any stage of the writing process, the model arising from the data highlighted a model of *audience awareness strategies* in three phases: pre-task, on-the-task, and post-task strategies.

Pre-task planning stage

Participants determine the language, the tone and the style of the written task in this stage,

based on their understanding of the audience parameters including age, gender, status, power, and attitude. As Kirsch and Roen (1990) argue, the perceived disposition of the reader can heighten sense of audience awareness in writers. However, this can occur both mentally and physically by collecting information from internet, libraries, etc. Before starting the task, some participants say, they plan for the task, e.g. by choosing a number of key words related to the topic and developing them into cogent arguments; this in turn allows them time to determine examples and reasons for the position they adopt in relation with the task prompt. As for the layout and organization of the written task, some of the participants (p4, p7, p23, etc.) decided which argument should come first and which last, i.e. they decided on the ascending or descending order of their reasons. Some described their arguments as effective (p19), adequate (p1), and realistic (p11), which are indeed a sign of attending to audience who may not easily accept commonplace arguments.

Although many considered the minister as a highly-esteemed (superior) authority in the government and their own as an inferior student, others stated that this was not a barrier to hamper their flow of communication in writing (p9), and did not allow this feeling to keep some words unsaid (p6). However, such a finding seems to oppose Vergaro's (2004) finding that Italian business promotion letters usually keep the reader highly esteemed and humble the writer; such a feeling seems to have diminished in the current culture of Iranian youth while it was customary in the past. Also, some participants resorted to finding good and convincing reasons in order to compensate the authority gap between the reader and the writer by referring to the hidden aspects of the decision proposed by the ministry to catch the attention of the reader and to highlight their own informed concern about the decision (p34).

On-the-task strategies

These constitute the major part of the endeavor by attending to the task content and organization (paragraphing, thesis statement formation, etc), language (addressing, questioning, dictionary work for word labels and connotations, requests, etc), and interactiveness (sensitizing the reader by questions). Addressing the minister directly (using pronouns such as *you*), and naming him (as *Dr. Z.*) were the primary strategies that almost all of the participants did. Also, most of them introduced themselves at the beginning and put their signatures at the end as a sign of taking the responsibility of the content. However, some preferred to apologize first for taking his time (p2), which is a sign of respect originated in the Oriental culture.

An effective strategy was the dialogic aspect of the written tasks where writers felt the presence of the reader by, for example, giving answers to the questions they raised throughout the text (p36) in order to sensitize the reader to what they wanted to discuss (p33), or by giving the email address for further communication to further clarify the writer's position (p34). P34 asserted that he felt the presence of the minister while drafting the task and maintained a dialogic tone to avoid monotony in his style. The balance between the monologic and dialogic aspects of writing is a key factor for the success of written communication (Thompson, 2001). In fact, interactiveness

necessitates finding the right balance between the monologic and dialogic aspects of the writing (Thompson, 2001); however, this seems to be a genre-dependent attribute, where the amount of shared information between the writer and the reader can help determine the effective borderline. For instance, in a letter to a friend, to a teacher, to an authority in the government, or in research articles, textbooks, and many other genres, the amount of shared knowledge is a determining factor, and this may develop in proficient writers (Thompson, 2001).

Post-task stage

The final phase consists of playing double roles (of reader and writer) and revisions (of tone, language and style). While playing double roles is neither easy nor seemingly practical, some participants were right to some extent in that when a writer makes effort to produce the best possible and effective task, there is no need for reading it twice, *particularly as the reader*. This is in lie with the claim that learners need skill to adapt their writing to the reader's needs and expectations and feel the necessity of audience adaptation (Quick, 1983). Many preferred reading the completed task as the writer for further revision; their revision strategies after classroom discussions led some participants to modify the letters (p25) or to soften the requests and criticisms (p31). For example, p26 had changed the order of presenting her reasons so that the more convincing reasons were posed first and the request was made at the end for rhetorical intensity; such a strategy, as p26 stated, was effective since the reasons were going to speak for her because she was unable to meet the minister face to face.

Conclusion

The findings indicated that *training* Persian learners of English resulted in their enhanced awareness of what strategies they can adopt for audience considerations, and that they consciously verbalized what steps they took after analyzing peers' written task in classroom discussions and getting teacher feedback. This will hopefully transfer to their future performance in writing to different readers, which is in line with Quick (1983), but has not been attended in their L1 rhetoric.

The findings provide hints for practical implications in the instruction of writing, and stress the inclusion of audience awareness training in syllabuses for writing courses. Also, investing more on the dialogic nature of the writing skill (Thompson, 2001), rather than its mechanical or formal aspects is emphasized. Therefore, it is expected of the assessment profession to take a pragmatic view of *audience* parameters in assessing EFL writing tasks. Although authentic tasks and authentic data can further highlight the claims of the present study, these can certainly be considered as potential uses and applications.

In general, this study was intended to shed light on the reality of what EFL writers conceive of audience engagement when writing EFL tasks. Finally, a reference to audience parameters in passing may not help culturally-affected learners develop a practical sense of audience awareness; rather, a reasonable time for training and practice is required to be integrated to the writing syllabi in EFL contexts. Being a qualitative study, this study did not take the

analysis of linguistic measures and other variables such as age, gender, and language proficiency into considerations; instead, it focused on the post-task mental experiences of the participants to develop a model of audience awareness strategies.

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APPENDIX 1: The Writing Prompt

Write a letter to the Minister of Science, Research and Technology and support your position with relevant arguments on the following topic.

The Ministry has recently announced that for the next educational year, there will be more university seats than the previous years. Normally, one out of 5 used to get admitted to state universities, and the rest had to choose Azad (Persian word for the Open University), Payame-Noor (Persian word for the University of Distance learning), Non-Profit or other types of universities. However, the announcement stated that 90% of the candidates can enter governmentally-based universities this year. Do you think that the change will move us toward the better or the worse? How would you argue that the policy makers are, or are not, in line with the needs of the society? What could be the consequences of such a change?

APPENDIX 2: The interview questions

Note: The questions were not considered as closed-ended and were followed on the basis of what the participant stated.

1. In your letter to the minister, how did you select your style, language and tone?
2. Was it different from other tasks?
3. Did you read the written task as the mister at the end? Or did you feel that you are writing to the minister while drafting?
4. Were you concerned about his objections to your comments?
5. Did you expect an answer for the criticism you made about the decision?
6. Did you make a clear request in your letter? Where in the letter?
7. How did you develop the thesis statement and the topic sentences of each paragraph? Explain.