Intersubjectivity and the Writer:

Turning a Class Paper into a Journal Article

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間主観性と筆者：

授業課題レポートから投稿論文への転換

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Abstract

Graduate students who want to publish papers they have prepared for a graduate class need to take into account the differences in audience, contents, and purpose when they prepare to submit the manuscript for review to a professional journal. Editors and authors lack the same intense intersubjectivity that is typical of the professor-student relationship, and the paper must be amended to reflect the different relationship between the author and the journal's readership. This article discusses the nature of intersubjectivity as it is reflected in a written text, and makes some specific suggestions for modifying such a manuscript.

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　大学院生は，授業の課題として書いたレポートや論文を査読付きジャーナルに投稿する場合に，投稿論文と授業用のものとでは読者も内容も目的も異なるということを考慮する必要がある。教授と院生との間には強い間主観性が存在するが，ジャーナルの編集者と筆者という関係においてはそのような間主観性は欠如している。従って授業課題として書かれたものを投稿論文にする際には，この関係の違いを反映させて修正が加えられなければならない。本稿はレポートや論文に見られる間主観性の特徴を検討し，修正がいかになされるべきかを提案する。

Introduction

While serving as Associate Editor for Japan's leading English-language research journal in applied linguistics, regularly processing manuscripts that ranged from the immediately publishable to the "needs work" variety, I became familiar with a specific type of submission, the class term paper submitted by a writer enrolled in a graduate program. Although many manuscripts that fell into this category were well-written and interesting, they were typically unacceptable for publication in a professional journal. Event though these papers had presumably been "A" papers in their original context, and were organized, fluently written, and interesting, we routinely sent them back for extensive rewriting.

Why doesn't a good class paper necessarily work as a journal article? In the discussion that follows, I will try to answer this question, as its implications formed a persistent subtext in our communication with graduate-student authors. Although they did not ask it explicitly, it was clear from their responses that they felt frustrated by our rejection of what had clearly been a well-received class assignment.

Differences between a Class Paper and a Journal Article

Consider the different qualities of a good class paper and a good journal article. While both kinds of texts require the writer to "play the academic game" in that there are conventions which apply, they differ on a few crucial points, specifically AUDIENCE, CONTENT, and PURPOSE.

The *audience* for the class paper is almost always the instructor of the class and nobody else. While some instructors may build in a peer reading experience, there are few graduate classes where the paper is not written for, and evaluated by, the instructor (or her proxy, the graduate teaching assistant). The *content* of the class paper derives directly from the subject matter of the class, which is not surprising, and, perhaps more relevant, reflects the biases and emphases—for better or worse—of the instructor. Most different of all, however, is the *purpose* of the class term paper. The research paper assignment is designed to put the student writer in a good light. The purpose of the class paper is to demonstrate in a highly tangible way that the writer is ready and willing to play the role of graduate student with diligence and care. The assignment serves as a forum for the student writer to display knowledge of research writing conventions, APA citation style, and other fundamental details of the craft.

These comments are not meant cynically or critically. The reality of education at all levels is that it serves both a cognitive and a socializing function. Graduate school, no less than elementary school, is an experience in learning the rules and strategic movies of a new game. However, the lines between the field of the classroom and the field of the professional journal

may be less than clear, because graduate students are often highly experienced, working professionals, and because graduate education involves engagement with professional-level texts. The graduate student who has worked hard in a graduate class may not be aware of the subtle differences between being a student writer and being a professional writer, since the two overlap in many ways.

A good classroom paper reflects the conventions of the classroom. Thus, it follows that a journal article reflects the conventions of the larger professional forum. While the two kinds of texts do share many features, they differ along the lines mentioned above. First, the *audience* or intended readership of a published article is the wider membership of the field, as opposed to the single reader for the class paper. To compound the difference, the readership of any given journal is both larger and more demanding than the instructor/reader ever needs to be: journals have their own areas of focus and emphasis, and the readership expects to see certain kinds of articles appear in them. The editor attempts to reflect, as well as to shape, this expectation in each issue. Thus, we can say that the teacher awards a grade based on a clearly-stated set of criteria that are known to the student writer from the beginning of the semester and which lose most of their relevance once the semester is finished, whereas the editor selects manuscripts according to a more fluid set of criteria which have both a more complex genesis and a less-defined term of application. Editors are not teachers, they are representative members of the readership community who are invested with the power to serve as gatekeepers to the protected arena of the published journal. The norms of this arena are not constructed individually by the editors, but are construed and established over time through the interactions of hundreds of people in the profession.

Second, the *contents* of a good journal article must be interesting to readers who already have a rich background of experience and knowledge in the field. The editor, unlike the instructor, has not worked extensively with the readership as a primary guide and mentor, in the process shaping their understanding of an appropriate topic. Rather, the appropriateness and the interest of any given topic depends on a constellation of historic, intellectual, and sociological factors that the editor does not control or shape nearly as strongly as the instructor shapes the input that a student writer gets. So while both texts are expected to display high levels of writing and research, the journal article must make the author's assumptions, research questions and goals, and the implications of the research itself, *explicit*. The author should make clear and definite links to existing literature and issues of concern in the field, and—most challenging of all—must make, in some way, an original contribution to the field.

Finally, the author's *purpose* for writing a journal article is quite different from that of the graduate student writer. The basic reason that a student writer typically writes is to pass the class, no matter what other educational benefits may also ensue. The writer of a professional

article, however, writes to add to the existing literature in the field and to lengthen a professional CV. The student writer knows the paper will probably cease to matter once it is graded, but the journal author hopes devoutly that the article will become common currency among readers everywhere. The author may be publishing, of course, so as not to perish, but there is also the pressing need to be part of the professional conversation. Especially in a field like applied linguistics, where many of the best articles are as often written by practicing teachers as by researchers, writers tend to be isolated from each other. The classroom is a fertile laboratory for ideas but also a lonely one. The author who submits an article intends his or her readers to react, to question, to argue, to agree. The student writer, on the other hand, expects his reader to read, grade, and return the text. Full stop.

Intersubjectivity: A Shared Understanding

Is there a way of understanding the reason for these differences that can be helpful to the novice writer? I propose that a key explanatory factor is the notion of *intersubjectivity*. Simply put, intersubjectivity between instructor and student is high, while intersubjectivity between the readership (and an editor) and author is low. Where intersubjectivity is high, expectations and understandings—of words, of goals, of actions—are shared among participants; where intersubjectivity tends to be low, participants need to make their meanings and intentions explicit each time.

The term comes from psycholinguistics, and refers to a temporary state of shared understanding. Intersubjectivity varies among situations and interactions, depending upon the participants, their past experiences, their linguistic proficiency, and their goals in the communicative act. To the extent that a speaker and listener share assumptions and definitions, intersubjectivity is high. To take a simple example (adapted from Rommetveit, cf. 1979), a wife answers the phone and tells the caller that her husband is free to chat: "He isn't working, he's mowing the lawn." Fifteen minutes later, the wife's critical mother calls up and asks what the husband (her lazy son-in-law, whom she suspects of idling away his weekends) is doing. The wife answers: "He's working, he's mowing the lawn!" Two contradictory statements, produced about the same man, doing the same chore, only a few minutes apart. What is different is the shared understanding between the wife and her two interlocutors. With the neighbor, the shared understanding of the word 'work' is 'important activity that should not be interrupted' while with the mother, the shared understanding is that 'work' means 'not wasting time, not being idle.'

We all use this kind of shorthand frequently, in both personal and professional relationships. Intersubjectivity is what makes communication possible, what prevents speakers and listeners from needing to stop and analyze every single utterance as if it is

completely new. Shorthand references ("Hungry?" "Yeah." "Jimmy's?" "Lulu's."), shorthand grammar ("What about them Dodgers?"), shorthand implications and assumptions…..we take intersubjectivity for granted every day.

In the classroom, as in real life, intersubjectivity is built up over time. Often, the first class meeting in a semester is devoted to orientational activity that helps to seed intersubjectivity between the teacher, who has the big picture of the course already clear in her mind, and the students, who bring a variety of expectations and understandings to the class at first, many of which may be inaccurate or irrelevant. Indeed, a "good teacher" is frequently one who understands the importance of encouraging and confirming the growing intersubjectivity between herself (in the role of instructor/planner) and the students (followers and executors of those plans). The term paper that is typically the culmination of a semester's shared experience succeeds because the students have been—subtly or not—encouraged and nudged into seeing the information being taught in a way that meshes with the way the teacher sees it. This is not to claim that teaching is the same as brainwashing; similarly, nobody would say that the wife and her two phone callers have brainwashed each other! They have simply accumulated—as neighbors, family members, and speakers of the same variety of English—enough of the shared shorthand that is a sign of high intersubjectivity. This shorthand is part of why and how language works. It is not a sign of malignant intent: it is simply a human ability to create and retain meanings for as long as they are useful.

Just as intersubjectivity is relevant for speakers, it is important for writers. When the graduate student writer makes a reference to a topic, an issue, a controversy or an outside source, he does so within the context of shared experience and expectation that the instructor consciously creates within the classroom. Such references do not need to be unpacked or extrapolated, as they are evidence—usually welcomed by the instructor—of exactly the kind of shared understanding that the teacher works to create among the participants in the course. Indeed, it can be claimed without cynicism that the term paper is explicitly and perhaps even primarily a display exercise, designed to exploit and celebrate the intersubjectivity of the instructor and students. To consider a somewhat less controversial way of looking at it, the instructor knows the student personally, at least to the extent of having interacted with the student over the course of the semester. As a writer, the student has a great advantage over the journal article author, having as he does a personal relationship with the entire readership of the text!

In short, an MA class paper is written primarily for a readership of one, with whom the writer shares a good deal of intersubjectivity. Of course, a competent instructor will maintain standards that are roughly similar to many other people in her field–saying that readership is one does not imply that that "one" is somehow skewed or completely idiosyncratic. But the MA student writes with the full knowledge that the instructor is the person who will ultimately

determine the quality of the paper, and years of participation in the education system helps that student writer understand how to play this particular game quite well. The journal article, on the other hand, is written by an author who rarely has a personal relationship with the editor, and in any case, cannot have a personal relationship with every member of the readership. The display aspects of the article are strongly secondary to the informational aspects of its contents, and there is a corresponding need to explicate every element in the article, a need that is quite different from the shared shorthand of the class term paper and the cozy context in which it originates.

Positioning the Text: Paper vs. Article

The writer who knows the intended reader well (and knows that the relationship goes both ways), does not need to spend much energy in positioning his or her text as a professional statement. Both parties understand the essential purpose of the class paper: to display willingness and facility to follow academic convention, display broad familiarity with existing professional literature, and demonstrate diligence—often for its own sake. Loading the reference list and the in-text citations with many more titles than is strictly necessary or helpful is a typical feature of many MA papers. The student writer accumulates references zealously—this looks good to the instructor, and makes the paper seem richer than it (probably) is in new information or ideas.

Instructors typically highlight a few favored sources, choosing them as class texts or assigned supplementary readings. Thus, MA papers often cite a severely limited number of sources heavily, even while listing many dozens more. Many class papers fall into one of two categories: they are either a record of the student writer's process of working through one or two of the instructor's preferred sources step by step, or they are a holistic, even superficial, review of the instructor's ideas. While there is nothing inherently wrong with either of these formats, they do not contribute anything to the wider body of professional knowledge. Instead, they serve as journal-like records of individual learning experiences. Too narrow or too broad: these are typical characteristics of texts that were produced for the class context.

How, in contrast, does a journal author position his or her article for the wider readership of the journal? The author's primary tool is the literature review, in which relevant and important existing research is selectively named, digested, and commented upon. Instead of displaying the knowledge of the writer for its own sake, the article's literature review serves to precisely and even aggressively position the contents of the article into an existing gap or lacuna in the field. Although clearly part of the academic game, the conventional lit review shows the reader the 'gap' that paper intends to fill, does not rely too heavily upon one source or author, and does not presuppose the reader's agreement with the underlying assumptions

of the author's argument. Instead, the author of a successful journal article specifically constructs the lit review that is necessary for the topic, the journal, and the existing gaps in the literature.

This explicitness must exist, because intersubjectivity is, as I suggested earlier, low between editor and author, and even lower between author and journal readership. Rather than the 'display' game, the author of a manuscript submitted for publication is engaged in the 'publication' game, similar enough to graduate study to be confused with it, different enough to be rejected by it.

As an editor, then, I needed to be able to tell would-be published authors that, (1) unlike the instructor, the editor tends not to reward, or even be impressed by, zeal; (2) academic conventions outrank classroom convenience; (3) literature reviews should not reflect a single instructor's viewpoint, and should not be dominated by a particular perspective or source; (4) the article must stand on its own, even while positioning itself in the web of existing professional literature; and, perhaps most frustrating of all, (5) the journal author is not writing for an audience of one (the editor) but for an audience of many (professional peers), even though it is the initial editorial review that determines whether the article will go out for review.

Conclusion

MA students are apprentices in their roles as junior academics, but authors who want to share their research and ideas with the broader professional audience need to conceptualize their status quite differently. Being a newcomer to the field is not quite the same as being an apprentice: most editors seek to encourage young, and first-time, writers because they are the future of the field and the journal itself. While any given journal tends to have its own particular focus and emphasis, it is nevertheless much wider in scope than any single class in an MA program.

My editor-in-chief and I used to present workshops for people who were interested in getting their papers published, either in our journal or in a comparable professional journal in another country (Verity & Cornwell, 2006). We ended our workshop with a few very specific suggestions, which I share here in order to bring this discussion, too, to an end.

Are there things I can actively do to increase my chances of getting published?
・ Become familiar with the journal you submit paper to
・ Write the class paper as if it were for publication from the start
・ Think like an editor: how does paper contribute to greater knowledge among people who know a lot about the topic and the field as a whole?
・ Proofread diligently, including citations and references

・ Have your paper read for editing and content by a peer or an instructor

・ Update your literature review to reflect current research

Are there things I should avoid?

・ A research question that is too broad or too narrow

・ Not addressing all stated goals

・ Overstating your conclusions, or the extent to which your findings can be generalized

・ References that are not cited, citations that are not referenced

・ Tables, charts and graphics that are not explained

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