The Effects of Training on Written Speech Act Behavior: Stating and Changing an Opinion

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A study is presented which compared the effects of training on the written speech act of stating and changing an opinion among nonnative and native speakers of English. A small-scale experiment was conducted to determine if skills could be taught to a nonnative Treatment Group, using another group of nonnatives as a Control Group and a group of native English speakers as a baseline to determine the components of the speech act. The Treatment and Control groups were comprised of graduate students in an advanced reading and writing summer course in the ESI program at the University of Minnesota. Persons in all three groups read two opposed articles on differences on the male and female human brain, then were instructed to role play a professor taking one of the two positions in the articles. Respondents then had to change their stance in favor of the other position, as presented in the articles, and write an essay for a journal or professional newsletter about their change of opinion. After five weeks, respondents in the Treatment and Control Groups underwent a similar procedure with articles that took sides on the greenhouse effect. Additional data on the process was obtained from verbal protocols with three nonnative participants in their native language. Overall, training did have a positive effect, with some differences in the kinds of strategies employed by nonnatives versus natives and in the use of logical connections indicating concession. Verbal report data provided retrospective insights into how respondents approached the task, as well as into the basis for their decisions during the process.
INTRODUCTION

Rod Ellis (1994:187-88) recently concluded a chapter on the pragmatics of language acquisition with this observation on speech act research:

Finally, it should be pointed out that the study of interlanguage pragmatics acts in L2 acquisition has focused on the spoken medium and has paid little attention to writing. This is particularly the case with illocutionary acts. In effect, therefore, although we know something about how ‘contextualized’ acts such as requests, apologies, and refusals are acquired, we know little about how learners acquire the ability to perform speech acts found in decontextualized, written language.

Ellis goes on to say that speech act performance in written discourse may differ considerably from that in oral production, and asserts that pragmatic research on language learning needs to consider written interlanguage.

This study presents the results of an experiment which investigated the process of stating and changing an opinion as it is conducted by nonnative learners of English in a written task. The experiment established a comparative baseline of native-speaker data and imitated a common situation in written academic thought (e.g., in journal articles or professional newsletters): changing one’s mind about an issue. In light of Ellis’s observation, the study brings together two strands of usually unrelated research: (1) learners’ performance of speech acts in a second language (a branch of second-language acquisition research), and (2) the way in which functions are expressed by skilled writers of Scientific and Technical English (a branch of research on English for Specific Purposes). The central question for us here concerns the differences between native speakers when they state and change an opinion and non-native speakers performing the same illocutionary act.

Myers (1989) suggests that politeness strategies are used to mitigate two central impositions expressed in scientific writing: claims made by the writer and denials of claims made by others. To express an opinion is to make a claim (particularly central in “establishing a niche,” in Swales’ (1990:141) terms) and to make a claim is to impose one’s opinion on others. The centrality of these two functions, and their impositional nature, require the sophisticated use of politeness strategies, which in turn result in the use of the variety of speech acts and stylistic features characteristic of scientific writing. The complexity of those features is still being described by researchers, and certainly remains to be taught explicitly to nonnative speakers of English.

An additional problem is that the task of performing a critical review of the work of others with the intent of offering one’s own view may be culturally difficult for nonnative speakers. We have observed many such learners who, when confronted with such a task, simply report views without interpretation and without taking a stand on the matter. The responses of such learners, when asked about their difficulties, suggest to us that they are often quite aware of the impositional nature of the speech acts they are being asked to perform, and simply opt out of performing them (Bonikowska, 1988).

Part of the problem is that, in stating an opinion in writing, a writer is performing a speech act, acceptable performance of which in an American academic context may not be overtly clear to nonnatives. In fact, nonnatives may have no idea as to how to perform this speech act acceptably in such a context. For example, skilled academic writers may be apologizing for an earlier view, but may do it through a speech act strategy that seems more like a displacement of responsibility onto the scientific community than an individual acceptance of responsibility (a positive politeness strategy, as explained by Myers [1989:7-8] and Ellis [1994:161]). Instead of acknowledging responsibility for previous views, skilled writers make it appear that they were victims of circumstance—that “the field” imposed this view upon them. Myers cites Blake (1983), who dismisses all earlier viewpoints, including his own, this way: “Thus none of the current ideas on the relation of coding sequences to protein function and structure seems fully correct” (Blake, 1983, cited in Myers, 1989:8).

Nonnatives may not even realize that the writer in this

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example is changing a position and offering an apology, however covertly, for having taken a previously erroneous position. It may also be the case that the speech act is stated by means of language forms that nonnatives have trouble interpreting. For example, the writer may use a negative politeness strategy, employing a hedge in order to play down the discrepancy between what s/he had claimed in the past and what s/he ascribes to at the present moment. This hedge may be in the form of a modal with impersonal subject, e.g., "one might now construe that...," or even a passive, "it could now be surmised that..."

What nonnative writers, their English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instructors, and their instructors in academic courses have come to realize is that the fact that nonnative writers of English are good writers in their native language does not imply that they will be effective writers in English. As Kaplan (1988) and others have pointed out, nonnative writers may not be aware of the frequency and distribution of given written functions, nor may they be aware of the structural conventions used for expressing these functions. Certainly, as we have already pointed out, the work of Myers (1989), Swales (1990) and others indicates that these features, as used by skilled writers in various academic fields, may be quite complex.

The job of the ESL student in interpreting and then presenting conflicting views in the academic literature, then, is complex. While reading text in order to comprehend opposing views, ESL students need to identify the functions performed by the speech acts involved (e.g., making a claim, disagreeing with a colleague’s opinion, apologizing for an error in one’s own earlier claim, suggesting further research). They may also need to identify sometimes subtle language forms that writers use to express these functions (e.g., mitigation to tone down a statement—"a somewhat helpful view").

In their academic course work, ESL students are frequently called upon to provide a critical review of the work of others and to offer their own view. This act, often incorporated into a "review of the literature," is basic to academic writing, particularly writing for publication. On the face of it, a critical review of the literature would seem straightforward. However, research on the grammar and rhetoric of Scientific and Technical English has shown that a literature review can be deceptively complex: the frequency and distribution of the functions expressed, and the structural conventions used to express those functions may be far from obvious, even to non-specialist native speakers (e.g., Swales [1990:137-166] provides an excellent review of research on Scientific and Technical English article introductions).

In stating their opinions in writing (in term papers, theses, journal submissions, and the like), ESL students are faced with choosing speech acts that are socioculturally appropriate—for example, knowing if and when to apologize for a previous opinion. If they deem it appropriate to apologize, they need to know which strategies or semantic formulas within the apology speech act set to use (see Olshain & Cohen, 1983). For example, they might use expression of apology ("I am sorry") and acknowledgment of responsibility ("I misjudged the importance of..."), but would be unlikely to include the strategy of promise of non-recurrence ("I will never do that again"). In addition, the students need to have at least some control over the language forms that are considered sociolinguistically appropriate at the given level of formality. Whereas ESL students may be aware of the proper speech act to use (e.g., an apology) and the semantic formulas appropriate for realizing the given speech act in the given context (e.g., an expression of regret and an acknowledgment of responsibility), they may still fail to select the appropriate language forms to convey the speech act (e.g., "excuse me," when "really sorry" would be a better indication of genuine regret).

It has been suggested that Asian students are taught to represent text meticulously and to respect each text, but not to take sides or to criticize them, i.e., "the criticism of a neophyte" (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991). Ballard and Clanchy suggest that Japanese students may justify the bases for differing interpretations of source material but will not test or evaluate these interpretations, as the intention is to achieve harmony. While these students may develop arguments through implication, these arguments are likely to go unrecognized by American readers of their university essays (1991:33). The concern for harmony apparently has deep roots in the Eastern approach to communication, more so than in that of the West.

According to Cushman and Kincaid, "The Western per-
spective is seen by the East as that of preserving political, social, and economic freedom for the individual" (Cushman & Kincaid, 1987). Myers' (1989) research indicates that this view about how Eastern and Western perspectives differ may not apply so simply to the subculture of Western science:

I will assume in the subculture of science: (1) that the social distance between individuals--D--must be treated as very great; (2) that the relative differences in power between individuals--P--are supposed to be small, but (3) that the community as a whole is supposed to be vastly more powerful than any individual in it. Thus ... one researcher must always humble himself or herself before the community as a whole. Of course in reality scientists have a network of informal contacts, collaborations and long-standing personal commitments that do not require great social distance. But none of this is to emerge in print ...everyone must present themselves as equally the humble servants of the discipline. (1989:4)

Thus, for Western academics, the complex task is to present themselves in print as humble servants of the scientific community, while at the same time asserting individuality: expressing their unique opinion, making claims, and discounting the claims of others. The use of politeness strategies which involve hedging, use of the passive, modals and other structural conventions described by Myers (1989) permits Western academics to make claims while simultaneously presenting themselves as servants of the scientific community.

This article reports the results of an experiment aimed at determining the manner in which ESL students express and change opinions in their academic writing, and the extent to which the skills associated with expressing and changing an opinion in this context can be taught. The study examined the intersection of learner performance of speech acts (again noting the bias toward oral production) and the deployment of such acts in academic writing. The research questions investigated in the current study were as follows:

1. How can the written speech act of stating an opinion and then changing it be characterized amongst natives?

2. How can the speech act of changing an opinion be characterized amongst nonnatives? What similarities and differences are there between native and nonnative respondents?

3. What are the effects of training in speech act production on the written speech act of changing an opinion?

4. What are the processes that respondents go through in performing such a task?

The study is interdisciplinary in nature in that it combines reading comprehension, writing skills, and sociolinguistic awareness as well. The study has scholarly value in that the field of literacy is currently looking at the relationship between reading and writing in academic settings. It has even been suggested that at times it is difficult to draw the line between reading and writing. Furthermore, there has been a keen interest over the last decade in the role of speech acts in discourse, especially regarding the more complex speech acts such as apologizing, complaining, and requesting, since considerable language proficiency is called for in order to understand and to execute them effectively.

At the more applied level, the importance of such research for the training of nonnative English-speaking academics cannot be overemphasized. There is a need to better understand the sources of difficulty for nonnatives in preparing reviews of the literature, and there is a commensurate need to generate training materials that would help to rectify the situation by dealing with such issues in the ESL courses that these students take.

DESIGN
Sample
Twenty-five students in the two most advanced reading/composition classes of the 1992 Summer Intensive English Language and Orientation Program (SIELOP) at the University of
Minnesota participated in the study, one class of thirteen as a treatment group and another class of twelve as the control group. The Treatment Group was comprised of six German speakers, four Japanese speakers, and one speaker each of Korean, Chinese, and Italian. The Control Group also consisted of six German speakers, two Japanese speakers, and one each of Korean, Thai, Croatian, and Arabic. There was also a baseline group of ten native speakers, all teachers at the Minnesota English Center, who provided data for comparison.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

All three groups received a pretest in which they were given two brief articles with conflicting views on an academic theme—namely, research comparing the male and female brain. The first, “Brain Structure Explains Male/Female Differences,” was excerpted from an article appearing in the New York Times (Goleman, 1989), and the second, “Brain Structure Does Not Explain Male/Female Differences,” was excerpted from a book dealing with biological theories about women and men (Fausto-Sterling, 1985). The texts were both about 1,300 words long.

The ESL students were told to role-play a professor who had taken a public stand in favor of the views expressed in one article, but who now had found irrefutable evidence to favor the views expressed in the second article. The students could choose which article would represent their initial position and which their current position. Hence, the student as “professor” was given the task of writing a brief article for an academic journal or newsletter, summarizing both views (approximately 80 words per summary), noting that he or she had changed his/her opinion and now ascribed to the second view, and apologizing for having previously ascribed to the first view. The task took them approximately 1 hour.

Given the complex nature of the task, the students were given their papers back for the purpose of revision if they did not complete the task as requested—i.e., if they took a position but did not indicate that this was a change of opinion. This procedure was utilized to reinforce the notion that academic writing is usually accomplished through the writing of various drafts, in a process-oriented manner. Thus, one of the investigators read all papers and supplied the students with a brief critique, indicating what portion of the task was misinterpreted or omitted and requesting that the student revise the task.4

The Treatment class of ESL students then received training from their regular classroom teacher in how to prepare such reviews of the literature and how to take a stand in such cases. Parts of five class sessions were devoted to the training, and the students did some of the work out of class. Among their training materials was Leki’s (1989) chapter on “Responding to Written Arguments,” which presents two brief texts with conflicting views and then guides students through the summarizing of both positions and the formulation of a personal stance on the issue. The students were also trained in the use of appropriate speech acts in their written literature reviews, based on a content analysis of the responses collected from the ten native-speaking ESL teachers/teacher trainees performing the same task.5 The control group received the regular summer course.

Five weeks later, the students were once again asked to perform the same task. This time the two articles with conflicting views were, “The Greenhouse Effect is Potentially Disastrous,” excerpted from an article in The Nation (Steel, 1984) and from USA Today (Anonymous, 1986), and “The Greenhouse Effect is Exaggerated,” excerpted from an article by Landsberg (1984).6

Three of the Japanese ESL learners, one from the Treatment Group and two from the Control Group, met with the native Japanese-speaking research assistant who had them provide retrospective self-observation in Japanese shortly after performing the posttest task. Among other things, the respondents were asked how they selected the texts that would represent their first and second positions and how they actually constructed their responses (e.g., choice of vocabulary and grammatical structures).

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

a. Rating of the responses: Two raters rated the responses on the written tasks in scrambled order so that the raters were unaware of whether the response was from the Treatment or the Control group. The order of pretest and posttest tasks was also scrambled and the raters were told not to pay attention to the content of the responses. They focused on the language in the
responses that could be used to identify the respondent's position. They rated the responses on a scale from 4 to 1 for their performance on the task:

4 = good - a position is stated and then a change of position is stated.

3 = fair - the two positions are there and include a shift in opinion, but one or both may have to be inferred.

2 = poor - just one opinion was stated and no change of opinion.

1 = very poor - the respondents did not perform the task. For example, all they did was to summarize one or both of the texts.

b. Verbal report: The Japanese research assistant transcribed in Japanese the retrospective verbal report protocols from the three Japanese ESL students, translated the transcriptions, and prepared responses to four research questions: the two noted above (i.e., matching opinions with texts, and actually composing the written task) and two others relating to the processes involved in reading the two texts and in summarizing them (Itaba, 1992).

RESULTS

1. How can the written speech act of stating an opinion and then changing it be characterized amongst natives?

Although the sample of native writers was limited to ten, there did emerge a structure for stating and then changing a position. There tended to be some indication as to the duration of the previously held opinion and as to the time when the new view took effect. Then there was a brief statement of the original opinion. Next, there was usually a logical connector of concession, followed by a statement of the new opinion and an explanation or justification for it, occasionally with a time frame for the new opinion. On occasion there would be a comment or apology for having held the previous opinion and once or twice an indication of collective or individual responsibility for the previously-held opinion. The semantic formulas (speech act strategies) were as follows, although their order varied slightly:

a. a time frame for the first position: “as recently as one year ago,” “in 1984,” “until reading...,” “originally.”

b. a statement of the first position: “I held that...,” “many, including this researcher, argued that...,” “the past, I supported the view that...”

c. a logical connector of concession: “however,” “despite,” “in spite of.”

d. a time frame for the new position: “just recently.”

e. an expression of a change of opinion:

1) direct expression of change of opinion: “I would like to retract my previous position that...and state that I now feel...,” “now, however, after years of examining research findings, I am not convinced that...I no longer feel that...”

2) indirect expression of change of opinion: “that have/has prompted me to reconsider my stance...,” “this leads me to believe more that...”

3) focus on current opinion: “the position I now hold is that there is irrefutable evidence that...,” “I now tend to agree more with the argument that...”

f. an explanation, justification, or cause for the change of opinion:

1) the writer as agent in the change of opinion: “further research on my part leads me to doubt these claims and pushed me to investigate...,” “a deeper investigation has led me to reconsider...”

2) lack of evidence for the prior stance prompts the change of opinion: “indeed, with no hard data to support the claims...,” due largely to the lack of existing evidence...
3) new evidence causing the change of opinion: “compelling results,” “more plausible evidence for my new position...”

g. a comment: “we can’t go on insisting that there are no differences... anymore than we could try to cling to the idea that the earth is flat...”

h. collective or individual responsibility: “it has become clear that many of us in the scientific community erred when we rejected those early explanations for...” “what can we do?”

2. How can the speech act of changing an opinion be characterized amongst nonnatives? What similarities and differences were there between native and nonnative respondents?

a. A Comparison of Semantic Formula or Strategy Use

For the most part, the nonnatives used the same semantic formulas or discourse strategies as did the natives. This is not so surprising since the basic moves were specified in the task itself. Thus, the nonnative data often included a time frame for the first position, a statement of the first position, a logical connector of concession, a time frame for the new position, an expression of a new opinion, and an explanation or justification for the change of opinion.

With regard to the expression of the new opinion, the nonnatives used all three of the sub-strategies used by natives: direct expression of change of opinion, indirect expression, and focus on current opinion. Concerning the explanation or justification for this new position, the nonnatives also used all three sub-strategies used by the natives: the writer as agent in the change of opinion, lack of evidence prompting the change of opinion, and new evidence causing the change of opinion.

There were two strategies that some natives used that none of the nonnatives used, and there was one strategy used by nonnatives and not by natives. One of the strategies used only by natives was that of offering a collective or personal evaluative comment—which Cohen, Olshtain, and Rosenstein (1986) found to serve as a social lubricant in projective oral discourse9 in rough moments: “I am embarrassed to say, I found much of the research to be shoddy and the claims unwarranted...” “but we can’t go on insisting that there are no differences... anymore than we could try to cling to the idea that the earth is flat...” This sort of strategy is, in Myers’ (1989) interpretation of the Brown and Levinson model (Brown and Levinson 1978), an unmitigated face-threatening act of criticism, and as such it would probably be unusual to find such a bald statement in print in a professional journal (although such phrasing might be more likely in a letter to the editor of such a journal). The other strategy was that of evoking collective responsibility: “How wrong we were!” “it has become clear that many of us in the scientific community erred when we rejected those early explanations for...” “what can we do?” In these instances, the responsibility is shifted off the shoulders of the individual scholar and instead placed upon a larger, more amorphous group of academicians. This strategy is described by Myers (1989):

One way of making a criticism while minimizing the [face-threatening act] is for writers to use pronouns that include themselves in the criticism. Besides the WE that means the writers, there is a WE that means the discipline as a whole. ...Crick uses the...device when drawing lessons from the split gene episode. Lacking evidence we had become overconfident in the generality of some of our basic ideas (Crick, 1979). (Myers, 1989:7)

The strategy used only by nonnatives was that of explaining or justifying their first position: “The statements...seemed to be very strong, and so we thought that...” (German speaker), “We used our best equipment, our best specialist...We could not give consistent foresight...” (German speaker), “My observations were strengthened by the scientific investigations of...” (German speaker), “In #1, he shows some evidences which...So #1 is more reliable than #2 for me” (Japanese speaker). None of the natives felt compelled to explain or justify the position that they were now refuting. Perhaps it was a deliberate strategy of the natives not to call more attention to their previous position than they had to. The nonnatives, on the contrary, occasionally did this.
b. A Comparison of the Linguistic Forms Used
Perhaps the most conspicuous difference with respect to form was in the choice of logical connector of concession. The natives used forms like “however,” “despite,” and “in spite of.” The nonnatives used “but” almost exclusively. In fact, there were 22 instances of the use of “but” and only four uses of other connectors—all in the Treatment Group and all in posttesting. Three of these were appropriate—the use of “however” twice and the use of “despite” once. But one of the respondents who did use “however” correctly (a native Chinese speaker), used “but” and “nevertheless” incorrectly, perhaps in making an exaggerated effort to use connectors:

However, new studies and reports let me doubt my earlier position. The E.P.A. says that the greenhouse effect has the potential to destroy civilizations, in contrast to other environmental problems. But the officials will first deal with this problem if it is upon us. Nevertheless, it is necessary to act against the greenhouse effect before it is to late... [italics added for emphasis]

The author probably meant “consequently” or “hence” instead of “but,” and “clearly” rather than “nevertheless.” In both cases he has created an opposition that is not warranted, given the rest of the text that he generated. This result is reminiscent of Jisa and Scarcilla’s (1982) unpublished findings. In their study, nonnatives felt so compelled to use connectors (e.g., additives such as “and;,” contrastives such as “however”) which they had learned that they made more use of them per t-unit in their essays than did natives (36% vs. 21%). They also often used them incorrectly.

With respect to expressing a change of opinion, the nonnatives were more abrupt in doing so than were natives. Several natives used hedges or mitigators both in explicitly stating their change of opinion (“although I am not quick to make judgments, and by nature examine the facts carefully before taking a stand, I have on this issue had to change my view...”) and in focusing on their current opinion (“I now tend to agree more with the argument that...”). Nonnatives, on the other hand, simply came right out with the change statement (“I changed my mind...,” “I changed my attitude...,” “I have change my opinion...”) and/or with their current opinion (“Now I think...,” “Now I agree with X’s stand...”).

3. What were the effects of training on the production of the written speech act of changing an opinion?

The interrater reliability for the two raters was high: \( r = .91 \) on the pretest \((p < .001)\), and \( r = .94 \) on the posttest \((p < .001)\), using Pearson’s coefficient of correlation. The ratings were averaged and a t-test analysis for independent groups was performed on the data. The results showed that the Treatment and Control Groups did not differ significantly in pretesting, but that there was a significant difference in posttesting in favor of the Treatment Group (Table 1). In addition, a t-test of the gain scores was performed in order to adjust the posttest scores for the effect of pretest performance, and once again the Treatment Group came out significantly ahead (Table 2).

4. What were the processes that respondents went through in responding to the task?

The following are the findings from verbal report sessions in which three of the Japanese learners, one from the Treatment Group and two from the Control Group, provided retrospective self-observation in Japanese after performing the posttest task.

The first Japanese-speaking respondent (from the Treatment Group) decided not to reject either of the positions: “I thought each of the articles contains some truthfulness and, thus, persuasiveness. So, I didn’t turn any of them down but approached them with respect.” Apparently, the Japanese word kei ("respect") implies that some credibility is granted each writer’s authority, which makes it impossible to reject either one out of hand. The respondent finally chose the one that seemed more fact-oriented.

The second respondent perceived the task as a kind of game, and assumed more of a narrative, rather than argumentative, style. In other words, his statement flowed like a story, rather than reflecting a dialectical presentation of arguments. He said he debated in his mind like in a verbal game and created arguments haphazardly. This respondent chose a position which, as he put it,
"enabled me to make a story and actually write it.... there was no personal belief influencing this decision."

The third respondent reported that the choosing of an article to side with was "extremely hard to do," not because it was hard to weigh arguments, but because this task asked him, within a fixed time limit, to criticize arbitrarily a previous, artificially determined position in favor of his more recent position. He argued that this sort of process does not take place in writing in his area (medicine).

The first respondent reported that he attempted to express his change of position by creating strong reasons to support the act of changing his mind. He came up with one reason, namely, that one article was more fact-oriented than the other, and stated that he did not need to use modals or hedges: "I don't find it necessary to use hedges. It is I who changed my position, not others." The second respondent amplified the meaning of this lack of need for hedging: "In expressing the change of my previous position, I don't feel any social responsibility or anything of that kind." The third respondent added, "In this task, I was asked just to write. So I just wrote my summary." The Japanese investigator in these verbal report sessions concluded that the subjects may well have known how to hedge in English but did not find it important to do so in stating a change of viewpoint.

The second respondent noted that he did not envision a readership when he prepared the task because he viewed it as a verbal game. Thus, he reported that while he did care about grammatical accuracy, he did not care about how his sentences would be perceived by readers. Because the third respondent did not find it realistic in his area of medicine to express a change of viewpoint in "such a light-headed fashion," he also did not feel it important to "decorate his statements for this sort of game."

These responses speak to the validity of the task. These process-oriented data would suggest that because two of the respondents were not taking the task seriously, they were thus not making an effort to produce what they considered to be "public discourse." How different their language structures would have been in an authentic situation is, however, hard to say. The one respondent who did report taking the task seriously also indicated approaching the two articles with respect, as Ballard and Clanchy (1991) would suggest that Asian students do. Myers (1989) points out that one of the great difficulties of applying a functional analysis to scientific and technical writing is the lack of a definite addressee for published texts. Some of the comments of these subjects may reflect this problem.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study set out first of all to describe the speech acts of stating and then changing an opinion, both among native and nonnative users of English. The findings from this relatively small-scale study still constitute a beginning in this direction.

In sum, among the natives, there was a tendency to indicate the duration of the previously held opinion and when the new view took effect. Then there was a brief statement of the first opinion, followed by a logical connector of concession. Next, there often appeared a statement of the new opinion and an explanation or justification for it, occasionally with a time frame for the new opinion.

For the most part the nonnatives used the same semantic formulas or discourse strategies as did the natives. There were two strategies that some natives used that none of the nonnatives used and there was one strategy used by nonnatives, and not by natives. One of the strategies used only by natives was that of offering a personal evaluative comment, and the other was that of evoking collective responsibility. The strategy used only by nonnatives was that of explaining or justifying their first position. None of the natives explained or justified the position that they were refuting.

With respect to the form that the message took, the most conspicuous difference was in the choice of logical connector of concession. While the natives used forms like "however," "despite," and "in spite of," the nonnatives used "but" almost exclusively. Then with respect to expressing a change of opinion, the nonnatives were more abrupt in doing so. Several natives used hedges both in explicitly stating their change of opinion and in focusing on their current opinion. Nonnatives, on the other hand, simply came right out with the change statement and/or with their current opinion.

There seem to have been some systematic effects of training in the treatment group, both in terms of a greater awareness as to
the speech acts that the Treatment students needed to perform and in terms of the carrier language they were to use to convey these speech acts. Although the significance of the difference was modest (p<.05), the sample small, and the treatment relatively brief, the findings about the positive effects of training in the use of speech acts in written academic discourse are consistent with those for training in the use of speech acts in oral language (Olshtain & Cohen, 1990; Billmyer, 1990).

Regarding the processes used in producing the responses, the case study work with verbal protocol yielded some insights. Each of the three Japanese ESL respondents had a different reaction. The first treated the texts with such respect that it was difficult for him to choose one to favor. The second simply saw the entire exercise as a game which he did not take seriously. The third felt the exercise was difficult because he was asked to make an arbitrary choice, something that does not occur in his professional work.

With regard to any conscious selection of vocabulary and grammar, the first respondent reported that he attempted to express his change of position by creating strong reasons to support the act of changing his mind. None of the three respondents felt the need to hedge in their responses because they did not feel the situation required it. Furthermore, the perception that this was just a game influenced their responses. While the second respondent indicated attention to grammatical accuracy, he and the third respondent did not attend to how their sentences would be perceived by a presumed readership of academic colleagues.

The research aims originally included a focus on the nature of the respondents' summaries for each of the texts, as well as their handling of their opinions. This broader focus proved to be too ambitious in that the students had enough to do simply dealing with the stating of an opinion and then expressing a change of opinion. A few of the students in each group, both in pre- and posttesting, did not provide summaries of the two articles, but launched directly into a discussion of their opinions. In rating the responses it became clear that the issue was not how well the respondents summarized the two texts but of greater interest was how they articulated their position and then their change of position. The performance of the speech act then was the major concern.

We must remember that although the selected texts were relevant to the topics being discussed in the ESL courses at the time of the pre- and posttesting (i.e., “learning” and “the environment,” respectively), the passages were not directly connected to the respondents’ field of study. This lack of context expertise could have worked to the detriment of those less comfortable with the scientific nature of the subject matter. For this reason, a recommendation for follow-up research would be that the respondents perform such tasks using texts from their respective fields of expertise.

Even given the limitations inherent in the study, the results would suggest that such small-scale work is justified because it helps to improve our understanding of how native and nonnative written discourses compare in specific speech-act area. This type of research echoes the concerns of Ellis (1994) that data on written speech acts be garnered to demonstrate differences in acquisition and performance between written and oral discourse. The current study also provided insights as to whether systematic interventions to teach given speech functions would be of value. In this study, there seemed to be value in providing a treatment, but only after an empirical study of what ESL teachers would write and comparing that to what the ESL students wrote. Future research could also gather data samples from the nonnatives in their native languages in order to determine the influence of L1 discourse patterns on the writing of L2 text.
Table 1: Mean Differences in Ratings of Pretest and Posttest Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ t = -0.47 \quad \text{df} = 22 \]
\[ t = -2.46^* \quad \text{df} = 23 \]

* p < .05

Table 2: Mean Differences in Gain Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Gain Score</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>-0.58</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ t = -2.44^* \quad \text{df} = 22 \]

* p

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Elaire Tarone is a Professor and head of the English as a Second Language Program at the University of Minnesota. She is currently interested in learning more about the way children acquire second languages in classroom settings and has a continuing interest in the way learners learn to communicate effectively in an L2.

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NOTES


2 Following Austin (1962), illocutionary acts and speech acts are used synonymously in this paper, representing his view of such acts as inclusive of the social functions of both speaking and writing. However, it is worth noting that “speech acts” has commonly referred only to oral discourse.

3 Politeness strategies can be either positive, in which case the speaker is attempting to establish a social link with the hearer on the basis of equality or commonality, or negative, wherein the speaker wants to reduce the addressee’s sense of obligation (see Levinson, 1983).

4 On the pretest, four papers were revised, two from the Treatment...
Group and two from the Control Group. However, on the posttest only two papers were revised—both for the Treatment Group.

5 Actually, eight from this group did the task with the pretest passages and two did it with the posttest passages.

6 In both this and the previous task, the passages reflected the theme being addressed in the classroom at the time: “learning” in the first case and “the environment” in the second.

7 In other words, there was not strong support in the native-speaker baseline group for Myers’ processing step of displacing responsibility. Consequently, this did not emerge as a strong criterion for this particular speech act. This may be an artifact of the small sample size.

8 This represents a classic strategy for displacing personal responsibility, according to Myers (1989).

9 I.e., the respondents in the Cohen et al. (1986) study wrote down their responses in a discourse completion task presumably the way that they would say them.

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We would like to thank Susan Gilbert and William Flittie, the two ESL teachers who participated in this study. We would also like to thank the students, unfortunately too numerous to name. In addition, we acknowledge the feedback we received from Thom Upton, Jim Lantolf, and George Yule, as well as the editorial work of Lee Searles.

Hmong Gangs:
Preventing Lost Youth

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The literature which deals with the topic of gangs, and, in particular, with Hmong gangs, has seemed to focus on why children join gangs. But not every Hmong youth is in a gang. Perhaps the more pertinent question for educators is what prevents students from joining gangs? What are the factors present in their lives that eliminate the need to be affiliated with gang members? How large a role does success in schools play? What, if anything, can we as educators do to prevent or decrease gang involvement? In this article, we present a brief overview of Hmong history in the U.S. and discuss factors behind gang affiliation. The results of a survey given to 23 Hmong students at one St. Paul junior high school and one middle school are discussed, with recommendations for future research.

INTRODUCTION

It is said that history repeats itself. As the world continues to experience extreme changes politically and socially, so do the immigration populations continue to change. People from Europe and Scandinavian countries comprised the majority of U.S. immigrants at the turn of the century. Southeast Asians are now the majority group among immigrants in the Upper Midwest. In the Twin Cities, the Hmong community has received substantial news coverage for its enormous and rapid growth.

As these international populations have grown, problems