

Reader Versus Writer Responsibility Revisited: A Polish-Russian Contrastive Approach



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Abstract Since Hinds (Writing across languages: analysis of L2 text. Addison-Wesley, Reading, 1987) proposed his distinction between reader- and writer-responsible languages, there has been little research into what exactly makes a language, or text, either reader- or writer-responsible. Likewise, little has been done to estimate to what extent a specific language represents either side of the dichotomy (Salski, PASE studies in linguistics. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź, 2007). At the same time, apart from concern about sensitizing students to discrepancies between how texts are composed and perceived in different languages (Golebiowski, Transcultures 1, 2005), a growing need to teach clarity of expression in L1 writing can be observed in some contexts.

This chapter is an attempt to take Hinds' dichotomy a step further, looking into text features that constitute components of reader and writer responsibility. The authors propose a tool for investigating the phenomenon and report on a pilot action research project in which they put it into practice. Implications of such an investigation pertain not only to L2, but also to L1 academic writing instruction, where student writers need to learn to respond to the expectations of the discourse community they are about to enter.

Keywords L2 writing · L1 writing · Reader versus writer responsibility · Academic literacy · Discourse community · Intercultural communication

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1 Background

Anyone who has taught writing in a foreign or second language has probably heard from her/his students that what they are taught in their classes is not compatible with their previous writing instruction and the style they were instructed to adhere to when writing in their first language. In fact, this has to do not only with writing in a foreign or second language, it may also be true about any context in which students are taught to write for an audience they are not familiar with. On the other hand, L2 writers who have received a limited amount of writing instruction and practice in their first language, which is often the case of Polish and Russian students, may have little audience awareness or understanding of what their prospective readers expect of them. For these students, the difficulty inherent to learning to write in a second language doubles as, apart from mastering a second language, they also need to develop writing skills that they cannot transfer from their native language writing experience. Consequently, the term *reader versus writer responsibility*, coined by Hinds (1987), is related not only to language-specific text features but also to differences between educational traditions characteristic of different language cultures.

In this pilot study, we approach the phenomenon of reader versus writer responsibility as a derivative of cultural and educational traditions that are manifested in writers' practices and beliefs. It is the clash of these language-specific traditions that makes L2 writers compromise on their beliefs and adapt their behaviors, thus adding to the difficulty of learning to write in a second language.

2 L1 and L2 Writing

The ability to write has undoubtedly been of paramount importance to the development of civilization and culture. Written text allows transfer of information not only over distance, but also over time. At the same time, writing is by far the most complex of the four language skills, as it requires operating on the level of symbols (written forms) rather than words themselves (naturally acquired spoken forms). Psycholinguistics sees learning to write as transition from spontaneous and subconscious speech to consciously controlled language behavior (see Vygotskij 1999; Leont'ev 2014). As opposed to spoken native language, the ability to use written language—both L1 and L2—can only be developed in a systematic learning process (Leki 1992). Within this process, the learner develops awareness of varied language items and the ability to use them by making conscious choices.

While the ability to write—understood both as literacy and as text composition skills—is obviously formed at and by school, academic writing can only be taught at university. That is part of the professional training that university students need to undergo in order to become fully capable members of the academic community. As Bure et al. (2003) point out, “together with a body of specialist knowledge, every

professional receiving higher education should master a certain minimum of knowledge, habits, and skills connected with the academic style and register used within his/her field” (p. 3, authors’ translation). However, as Bure et al. further admit, paradoxically, academic communication is not always taught by higher education institutions. An analysis of academic textbooks and publications on native language writing pedagogy shows that academic written communication is rarely taught or analyzed in the Russian context (see chapter “[Academic Writing in a Russian University Setting: Challenges and Perspectives](#)”), with the exception of few works: Mitrofanova (1976), Zamurueva (2008), and Romanova (2006). This is also true for the situation at Polish universities. In Poland, although L1 writing manuals do exist (e.g., Kuziak and Rzepczyński 2000; Pawelec and Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak 2003), none of them is devoted specifically to academic writing in Polish.

In a way, foreign language writing is privileged. Students majoring in foreign languages receive instruction in writing as part of their general language development program. So, even if separate classes are devoted to academic writing and communication, they are considered necessary because they give foreign language students the opportunity to develop their competence in the language, not because they offer general practice in the skill of writing. Moreover, both Polish and Russian native speaker authors have published L2 English academic writing textbooks (Adams-Tukiendorf and Rydzak 2003, 2012; Dubovik et al. 1990; Yakhontova 2003; Markovina et al. 2013). This is, of course, justified because writing in a second or foreign language poses additional difficulties as it requires student writers to operate in a non-native tongue. Also, ESL writers are naturally concerned about their language development and, as Leki (1997) observed, they “consistently ask for the linguistic tools they need to succeed in their work in English” (p. 243). On the other hand, this preoccupation with foreign language forms leads to increased attention paid to both what should be, as the term itself suggests, lower-order concerns and the prevalence of the product approach in L2 writing instruction. What adds to the problem is that foreign language instructors who share native language with their students may be less sensitive to the less tangible higher-order concerns.

At the same time, it has to be remembered that writing skills are typically transferred from one language to another. As has been reported by Skibniewski (1988) as well as by Skibniewski and Skibniewska (1986), writing experience has more influence on the efficiency of writing processes than whether the writers are writing in their native or a foreign language. This has at least two important implications for L2 writing instructors. On the one hand, writing skills may be transferred from one language to another, so writing practice reaches beyond language boundaries, and, consequently, student writers can rely on the skills they developed practicing writing in other languages. On the other hand, in contexts where native language writing is underdeveloped, the need to master writing skills adds to the challenge of learning a foreign language. Yet it could also be concluded that academic writing skills need to be developed regardless of the language, as it takes time and practice to develop expertise in writing in any language.

3 Discourse Community

A parallel can be drawn between acquiring or learning a language, seen as becoming a member of a speech community, and learning to write academically, which allows entering a specific discourse community (see also chapter “[In at the Deep End: The Struggles of First-Year Hungarian University Students Adapting to the Requirements of Written Academic Discourse in an EFL Context](#)”). However, while the former may be a spontaneous, subconscious process, the latter must involve carefully planned activity. It is, then, crucial to look at what a discourse community is and what becoming a member of a discourse community involves. Swales (1990) lists six conditions that a group must meet in order to become a discourse community:

- Members share a “set of common public goals.”
- Members use specific agreed “mechanisms of intercommunication” within the community, even if individual members do not interact directly.
- Members use these mechanisms mainly to “provide information and feedback.”
- Members use “one or more genres” to achieve their aims.
- Members communicate using a set of “specific vocabulary.”
- Becoming a member requires achieving a certain level of “content and discourse expertise.” (pp. 471–473)

The above conditions refer to proficiency in any specific language, although only to some extent. Clearly, *common public goals* can be achieved both in one’s mother tongue and in a second or foreign language. *Mechanisms of intercommunication*, even in L1, have to be learned anew since they differ from those used by the more general speech community. Additionally, novice writers have to master the rules of the *genres* as well as *specific vocabulary* used both in L1 and L2 discourse communities. It should be concluded that participation in any discourse community typically involves knowledge and skills independent of or in addition to general competence in any specific language. What is more, members of any L1 speech community are likely to belong to a L2 discourse community, in which case it would be natural for them to communicate with each other in the second language.

Therefore, it may be concluded that academic writing, not only in L2 but also in L1, should be taught explicitly and practiced in meaningful realistic tasks that raise students’ awareness of the expectations of their new audience and show the characteristic features and genre requirements of the discourse community they are aspiring to enter. Explicit and systematic instruction in this area is likely to enhance the process of internalizing knowledge and mastering skills that the students will need to become fully efficient members of the target academic discourse community.

It seems self-explanatory that in order to help their students enter their respective academic discourse communities, tertiary education institutions, apart from teaching *content*, should also take care to develop students’ *discoursal competence*. This involves mainly, though not solely, teaching academic writing skills. Assuming that development of knowledge and skills necessary to achieve this aim can happen

naturalistically through immersion may not only prolong the process, but also expose students to the risk of failure in high-stakes situations such as taking essay examinations or submitting term papers. It is natural that even native speakers of a language, entering a specific discourse community, need to be acculturated into this community, as some of the norms respected in it are new to them or may be hard to accept. As part of their initiation into the discourse community, novice writers need to receive support from their more experienced colleagues, a process that resembles how children's language development is supported in their zone of proximal development by other, more experienced, language users.

4 Academic Literacy

Membership in an academic discourse community is marked, first of all, by academic literacy, which can be defined as “a composite of the generic, transferrable skills that are required of and developed by academic study and research” (University Skills Center 2014). Reaching far beyond the scope of the common understanding of the term *literacy*, academic literacy comprises a number of skills that are crucial to communicating efficiently in the academic context but are not required to the same extent in everyday communication. These are:

- knowledge of how academic discourse is structured and presented,
- knowledge of how academic discourse is produced,
- communication,
- creative and critical thinking,
- independent learning, and
- respect for the work and effort of others (University Skills Center 2014).

Universities need to realize that if high school graduates possess communication skills that only go as far as general language use, they have yet to develop skills of academic communication. Needless to say, educating novice academic writers entails socializing them for the role that is defined and imposed on them by the discourse community they are entering. They have to learn about academic discourse, how to comprehend it, and how to produce it. Likewise, it seems that many freshmen need to work on their learning and thinking skills, and these are closely related to respecting the intellectual property of other members of the discourse community.

It seems that the process of developing the six groups of skills mentioned above, postulated by the University Skills Center, University of Essex, rather than being seen just as spontaneous enculturation, should assume the form of informed and structured teaching that addresses the specific requirements of a given discourse community. Thus students can learn to avoid misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and errors of inappropriateness, and since effective communication involves mutual understanding, writing instruction needs to focus on making student writers aware of their prospective readers' expectations and teaching them how these expectations

can be fulfilled. Drawing on these assumptions, the present study attempts to extract and examine the components of what Hinds (1987) labeled as reader and writer responsibility in written communication.

5 Reader vs. Writer Responsibility

Hinds (1987) observed that written communication in various languages may require different amounts of effort from the reader and writer. As a consequence, second language writers, who are used to a certain balance of responsibility between the reader and the writer, typical of communication in their native language, may experience difficulties meeting the expectations of their new L2 audience. Ultimately, they may fail to communicate their message in a second language. According to Hinds, in English “it is the responsibility of the speaker to communicate the message”; on the other hand, Hinds gives the example of Japanese, where “it is the responsibility of the listener (or reader) to understand what it is that the speaker or author had intended to say” (p. 65).

Everyday L2 writing instruction experience shows that both Polish and Russian appear to be reader- rather than writer-responsible languages (cf. Salski 2007). At the stage of writing practice, these differences do not have to create communication problems; however, instructors sharing their students’ native language have to be careful not to overlook them. This may happen if, not being distracted by unfamiliar rhetoric of the text, they overemphasize lower-order concerns of their students’ texts.

Even though it cannot be denied that the reader versus writer responsibility dichotomy has a commonsense appeal, little has been reported with regard to any of the specific text features that account for a text being either reader or writer responsible. Therefore, before any investigation in this area is possible, it is crucial to establish criteria that may allow a text to be pronounced reader or writer responsible, or, more accurately, place a text along the reader/writer responsibility continuum. To this purpose, the present authors have analyzed a number of English-language writing manuals (Dollahite and Haun 2011; Leki 2002; Arnaduet and Barrett 1984), and, on this basis, have suggested a list of requirements that writers are instructed to meet in order to ease the reader’s task, i.e., a list of text features that make a text writer-responsible:

- A text should contain a sentence summarizing its main idea.
- Ideas should be formulated in clear and precise language.
- The writer and the reader should share content and formal schemata.
- The writer should take into account the reader’s knowledge.
- The writer should guide the reader through the text with appropriate linking devices.
- Organization of ideas should be made transparent by dividing the text into paragraphs.

- The content, rhetoric, and form of the text should match the reader's expectations.

Therefore, it can be concluded that a number of beliefs underlie writer-responsible text composition:

- The writer is aware of the reader's expectations of content, rhetoric, and form of the text.
- The reader expects to be guided through the text by means of logical paragraphs, appropriate linking devices, and clear and precise expression.
- The writer's overriding aim is to communicate with the reader rather than to display his or her own knowledge or command of the language.
- The writer accepts his leading role in the success of communication.

The pilot study reported on later in this chapter is based on the assumption that bearing the previously mentioned points in mind, writers may find it easier to create texts that will be writer-responsible, i.e., easier to follow and less demanding for the reader. However, the authors do not claim that the list is exhaustive; on the contrary, it can be seen as one of the aims of the present project, or similar studies to be undertaken in the future, to elaborate upon it further.

6 Methodology

In order to investigate representation of the concept of reader versus writer responsibility in students' writing practice and beliefs, a questionnaire was designed on the basis of the items listed in the previous section. The questionnaire included two sections: one consisting of 18 items referring to writers' beliefs and the other one comprising 19 items dealing with writing practice. In each of the items in both sections, the responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale. The degrees of the scales were adjusted to the content of the questions: Part one used an intensity scale (*definitely yes, yes, not necessarily, rather not, definitely not*), and part two used a frequency scale (*[nearly] always, frequently, sometimes, rarely, [almost] never*). Table 1 below presents the results of the questionnaire for both groups. Since the respondents received the questionnaire in their respective native languages, an English translation has been used, and all the questionnaire items are arranged in two sections as they originally appeared in the questionnaire.

In spring 2014, the survey was administered to first-year students of the Institute of English at the University of Łódź, Poland, and at the Moscow State University of Mechanical Engineering (MAMI) in Moscow. Each group responded to the questionnaire in their native language: Polish and Russian, respectively. There were 32 students of English philology in the Polish group and 37 students of linguistics in the Russian one. Although it was not stated explicitly whether the Polish group should respond referring to their experience of writing in Polish or English, it has to be remembered that because of their learning experience, most, if not all, of the

Table 1 Results of the questionnaire

| | Polish group (N = 32) | | Russian group (N = 37) | |
|--|--------------------------|------|---------------------------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Do you believe that ... | | | | |
| a sentence summarizing the main idea of the text helps the reader understand it? | 4.24 | 0.91 | 4.22 | 0.82 |
| how easy it is to understand a text depends on the clarity of the writer's expression? | 4.24 | 0.54 | 4.59 | 0.55 |
| success of written communication depends on how much writers' and readers' knowledge overlap? | 3.6 | 0.74 | 3.57 | 0.99 |
| communication is easier if writer and reader rely on the same principles of text organization? | 3.2 | 0.7 | 3.73 | 0.99 |
| the writer should take into account the reader's knowledge of the subject of the text? | 3.9 | 0.89 | 4 | 0.97 |
| linking words help the reader follow the writer's reasoning? | 4 | 0.7 | 4.24 | 0.64 |
| division of a text into paragraphs helps the reader understand it? | 4.52 | 0.6 | 4.32 | 0.82 |
| the reader should be left to reach his/her own conclusions? | 3.86 | 0.91 | 3.78 | 0.98 |
| effectiveness of communication depends on the reader's effort to understand it? | 3.57 | 0.87 | 3.81 | 0.94 |
| effectiveness of communication depends on the writer's effort in writing it? | 4 | 0.63 | 4.14 | 0.63 |
| the reader expects the writer to be able to organize the text logically? | 4.6 | 0.59 | 4.59 | 0.69 |
| the reader expects the writer to formulate ideas clearly and precisely? | 4.1 | 1.04 | 4.56 | 0.69 |
| the reader should extract from the text the most important information himself/herself? | 3.62 | 0.92 | 3.51 | 1.1 |
| reading consists of reconstructing the writer's intentions? | 2.75 | 1.17 | 3.81 | 0.97 |
| reading consists of decoding meanings conveyed by the writer? | 3.2 | 1.03 | 4.05 | 0.88 |
| reading involves cooperation in creating meaning? | 3.81 | 0.98 | 3.54 | 0.96 |
| writing consists of recording thoughts and information? | 4.24 | 0.7 | 4.76 | 0.43 |
| writing is communicating with the reader? | 4.48 | 0.68 | 4.32 | 0.85 |
| When writing academic texts, do you ... | M | SD | M | SD |
| assume that the reader will easily understand what you had in mind? | 2.71 | 1.35 | 4.62 | 0.59 |
| think that you should make it easier for the reader to understand your intentions? | 4.24 | 1.04 | 3.95 | 0.94 |
| try to make your point as clear to your reader as possible? | 4.57 | 0.68 | 4.76 | 0.49 |
| expect your reader to make an effort to understand the text? | 3.76 | 0.83 | 3.08 | 1.16 |
| assume that you demonstrate to your reader your knowledge and intelligence? | 4.14 | 0.85 | 4.4 | 0.9 |
| assume that you demonstrate to your reader your views and beliefs? | 3.76 | 1 | 4.24 | 1.09 |
| take care not to surprise your reader? | 2.38 | 1.02 | 2 | 1.2 |

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

| | Polish group (N = 32) | | Russian group (N = 37) | |
|--|--------------------------|------|---------------------------|------|
| know who you write for? | 3.81 | 0.87 | 4.03 | 1.09 |
| consider your readers' knowledge? | 3.9 | 0.94 | 3.08 | 1.23 |
| consider your readers' expectations regarding text organization? | 4.29 | 0.85 | 3.57 | 1.07 |
| take care to make your text understandable to your reader? | 4.71 | 0.56 | 4.59 | 0.64 |
| take care to make your text free from language errors? | 4.9 | 0.3 | 3.95 | 0.91 |
| take care to adjust your text to the standards required for the given genre? | 4.81 | 0.4 | 4.27 | 0.87 |
| pay attention to maintaining the appropriate language register? | 4.43 | 0.81 | 3.64 | 1.14 |
| take into account that the reader may evaluate you personally on the basis of your text? | 3.95 | 1.32 | 3.27 | 1.19 |
| check that the text renders your intended meaning accurately? | 4.38 | 0.97 | 4.14 | 0.79 |
| ensure that the reader will find it easy to understand your text? | 4.29 | 0.9 | 4.22 | 1 |
| think about how the reader may receive it? | 4.05 | 0.92 | 3.92 | 1.01 |
| ask someone to read your text and comment on it before you submit its final version? | 2.62 | 1.63 | 2.7 | 1.61 |

Polish respondents had written significantly more in English (as a foreign language) than in Polish (their native language).

7 Results and Discussion

The results of the questionnaire were obtained by assigning a numerical value from 5 (the most intensely/frequently) to 1 (the least intensely/frequently) to each individual response. Mean values as well as standard deviation of the responses were then calculated for each of the questions, and these are presented for both groups in Table 1.

As can be seen, generally speaking, there are few significant differences between the responses in both groups. This is not surprising, given the cultural background of both languages. This can be observed in the example of digressiveness, a text feature whose intensity seems directly proportional to reader responsibility: The more digressive a text, the more challenging it is for the reader to decode the writer's message. That Polish and Russian are similar in their use of digression can easily be seen by reading texts in both languages. This has also been confirmed by *thought pattern* diagrams proposed by Kaplan (1966) and Duszak (1997), who observed that digression characterizes both Russian and Polish texts, respectively. Also, Polish and Russian writers typically have a similar experience of learning to write, as in both educational systems, writing in the native language receives relatively little attention.

In both groups, as a rule, lower mean values of responses are accompanied by higher values of standard deviation, which indicates that a decrease in mean values results from more varied responses rather than from consistently lower responses throughout the group. Still, responses to a few questions differed between the groups. In the first part, referring to students' beliefs about writing, the average of the responses in the point on the reader's expectations of clear and precise expression on the part of the writer was over 0.5 higher in the Russian group than in the Polish one. Also, there were marked differences (of 0.85–1.06 points) in the answers to two questions about the nature of reading: The Russian respondents, to a larger extent than the Polish group, seemed to assume that reading entailed both reconstructing the writer's intentions and decoding meaning. By calculating the value of the point biserial coefficient, the level of correlation for these figures was established as mild. At the same time, it is worth noticing that the Russian group, more than the Polish one (4.76 vs. 4.24, respectively), saw writing as "recording thoughts and information" and less (4.32 vs. 4.48) as "communicating with the reader." All these figures, although they can be seen as a mere indication of tendencies, point to a slightly higher preference for reader responsibility in the Russian group.

The answers given in the second part of the questionnaire, focusing on writing practice, also confirm this tendency. First of all, the Russian students were more often ready to assume that their readers "will easily understand what they had in mind" than their Polish counterparts (4.62 vs. 2.71, respectively). In this point, the difference between the responses obtained from both groups was the biggest, and only here does the value of the point biserial coefficient (at the level of $r_{pbis} = 0.678$) indicate a strong correlation between the native language of the respondents and their responses in the questionnaire. Furthermore, the Russian group, more than the Polish students, seemed to believe that in their writing they "demonstrate their views and beliefs" (4.24 vs. 3.76, respectively). Moreover, the Polish students claimed to take their reader's knowledge and expectations into account more often than the Russian group (3.9 vs. 3.08 and 4.29 vs. 3.57, respectively). It is interesting that the Polish students, more than their Russian peers, "expect their readers to make an effort to understand the text" (3.76 vs. 3.08, respectively). This figure, seemingly contrary to the general tendency observed in the findings, may be linked to answers given in the last question of the first section of the questionnaire, where the Polish group indicated that they believed writing to be an act of communication more than the Russian group.

The Polish group gave markedly higher-value responses in the three questions referring to writers' concern about formal aspects of the language. They more often "take care to make their texts free from language errors" (4.9 vs. 3.95 in the Russian group), they "take care to adjust their texts to the standards required for the given genre" (4.81 vs. 4.27, respectively), and they are also more concerned about "the appropriate language register" (4.43 vs. 3.64, respectively). Arguably, these figures, as well as the Polish students' increased awareness of the fact that they may be evaluated on the basis of their texts (3.95 vs. 3.27 in the Russian group), may be attributed to the fact that they write mainly in English as a foreign language. They

may also be used to being assessed on the basis of accuracy and formal aspects of the language they produce, rather than communicativeness or clarity of expression.

8 Implications and Limitations

The present action research project can only be seen as a pilot study. As such, it has served a number of purposes. First, it aimed to create and apply a set of criteria to operationalize the reader- versus writer-responsibility dichotomy in written communication. The study appears to confirm that the proposed criteria meet the expectations and create grounds for differentiating between aspects of the complex phenomenon of reader versus writer responsibility and analyzing them in detail. This may constitute a valuable supplement to contrastive rhetoric studies by focusing on the causes of how text is constructed rather than on just the final writing product (cf. Golebiowski 2005).

The established scheme may not only be used to compare or contrast writing habits and beliefs about rhetoric of texts used for intercultural communication: It can also be used in teaching writing in a second or foreign language, as well as to diagnose awareness of audience expectations in native language instruction. This can be especially true for novices entering specific discourse communities, for example, in the academic context. In this way instruction may be oriented more efficiently towards those areas of written communication that require more attention either in a particular cross-cultural context or in specific cases of individual student writers. Also, data obtained in this way may contribute to a clear culture-specific focus in training writing instructors and writing center tutors. Additionally, the questionnaire could be used to survey experienced writers in order to create a benchmark of reader versus writer responsibility in a speech community of a given language or in a specific discourse community. Consequently, novice writers' responses could be analyzed against such a "responsibility pattern," and their awareness of the expectations of their audience could be raised. Also, comparison of such patterns across languages or cultures could bring interesting observations and conclusions regarding intercultural communication.

Finally, the findings obtained in the study itself point to interesting observations. While Polish and Russian are not only related Slavic languages and have been proven to be similar by contrastive rhetoric research, they also appear similar in terms of the reader- versus writer-responsibility dichotomy. On the other hand, the findings of the study seem to indicate a tendency for Russian student writers to assume more responsibility on the part of their audience.

On the other hand, it has to be acknowledged that the study is burdened with several limitations. The most important reservation is the size and composition of the study groups. If the project is continued in the future, not only a bigger number of respondents is necessary, but also a more careful selection of the respondents. This would allow for the elimination of undesirable variables in the backgrounds of the groups, e.g., data obtained from language students need to be compared with

results from a compatible group of respondents majoring in the same language. This will allow reliable statistical analysis of the findings and generalization of conclusions. Another point is that this pilot study relied solely on declarative quantitative data. First of all, before any far-reaching general conclusions are drawn, the findings need validation. Also, in order to obtain more objective and reliable findings, in the future it will be necessary to include tasks in the survey that require performing actions such as identifying the topic sentence in a paragraph, inserting appropriate linking devices, and, possibly, reacting to or evaluating samples of text. On the other hand, collecting qualitative data, for example in interviews or retrospective protocols, would make it possible to obtain a more in-depth insight into the investigated phenomenon and into the beliefs and decisions behind text composition and written communication within speech and discourse communities.

9 Conclusion

Hinds's (1987) observation that in different languages writers and readers assume different roles in order to achieve their communicative goals offers a plausible explanation of a problem facing many novice writers, especially those learning to write in a second or foreign language in which distribution of responsibility differs from that in the learner's mother tongue. This is the case of both Polish and Russian learners of English as a foreign language, who often find it difficult to see their texts from the perspective of their prospective audience. For these students and their instructors, Hinds's dichotomy is a relatively straightforward means of rationalizing a fairly intangible problem, which otherwise remains in the sphere of "the feel of the language."

Similarly, teaching writing in the native language, particularly for academic purposes, can rely on Hinds's model because, like second language writing instruction, it initiates learners into a new community (the academic discourse community in this case), where communication follows different norms than those governing everyday discourse. In this way, novice writers can easily be equipped with the *mechanisms of intercommunication* necessary for efficient communication in the academe, which typically requires intercultural *discoursal competence*, even if one communicates in his or her native language.

The present study is an attempt to pin down a relatively elusive construct of the dichotomy between reader and writer responsibility. The proposed questionnaire may be seen as a possible heuristic for examining not just the bipolar dichotomic responsibility distribution in written communication in a given language, or rather culture, or in a particular discourse community. It seems that with a rigorous approach and careful analysis of the data, it may also be possible to establish a scale of reader versus writer responsibility that could be used to characterize, compare, and contrast different cultures. For teaching purposes, it may be even more beneficial to analyze the different aspects that contribute to the perception of a language being reader or writer responsible.

The authors hope that the study of reader and writer roles in written communication, initiated by Hinds and pursued in this pilot study, will continue to shed light on the multi-faceted phenomenon of written communication and contribute to the success of all those who learn and teach the complex skill of writing in the first or second language, for academic, professional, or private purposes.

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