

Representing Audiences in Writing Center Consultation: A Discourse Analysis

by Robert Brown

About the Author

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In Plato's famous critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates declared writing a deficient form of communication next to speech, for any piece of writing, should it fall into the hands of an unintended reader, is susceptible to misinterpretation. He likened texts to orphans, who, upon separation from their authorial progenitors, wander about as message-bearing waifs. Obligated to stay on script, they can but parrot their parents' words, having no recourse to gloss, emendation, or retort.¹

One of the virtues of writing centers is that they compensate for the alienation of writing. If the canonical literate encounter is one where writer and reader, separated in time and space, meet only through the medium of the text, then the writing center consultation restores immediacy to written communication. In its traditional form, the tutorial brings writer and reader together to confer over a text in the dialogic manner so valued by Socrates. If the tutor has questions about the text, the writer is there to speak for it, and together they work to make the text a better realization of the writer's message. Like an author-attended rehearsal, writing center consultation gives writers an opportunity to preview their work before a private audience prior to sending it out into the world on its own.

A corollary to this preview situation is that writing center tutors are like the unintended readers that Socrates envisioned. By this I do not mean that tutors are indisposed to understanding clients' texts, only that they are not the audience for whom these texts were expressly written. Not only is this the case with coursework papers written for teachers; it is also the case with application essays written for scholarships or post-baccalaureate degree programs.

In consequence of being an unintended reader, tutors are regularly called upon to read and respond from the imagined perspective of the target audience. When that audience is a teacher, tutors can glean relevant information about the audience from assignment instructions or marginal comments, or by posing questions to the client. When that audience is someone whom the client does not know—say, the members of an admissions committee—then tutors must rely more on inference to anticipate how the audience will receive the text. This is not to say that tutors never express their own points of view about a client's piece of writing, but when they do, they tend to qualify it as coming from *a* reader, not *the* reader who will ultimately evaluate the work. Contrary to what Socrates feared, having an unintended reader get hold of one's writing need not result in misunderstanding, but for writing tutors it routinely involves projecting themselves into the mind of Audience X.

While writing center researchers acknowledge that interpreting audience expectations is a regular part of a tutor's work (Harris, "Talking in the Middle" 37), there has yet to be a study that examines how tutors actually represent audiences in their conversations with clients. This common, if unexamined, feature of tutor talk is the subject of this article. Reported here are the results of a qualitative discourse analysis undertaken to answer the following question: how do tutors represent audiences to their clients in carrying out the work of consultation? To answer this question I devised a method of analysis for ascertaining both the *form* and *function* of this phenomenon: 1) to identify the forms in which tutors represent audiences to their clients; 2) to describe the communicative functions that these representations serve in context.

Theoretically my method draws on the work of sociologist and communication theorist Erving Goffman, who analyzed "the

structural underpinnings” of social interaction in an essay entitled “Footing” (128). Of particular interest to my study is Goffman’s analysis of the speaker role. In brief, *footing* is the term Goffman coined to describe the relationship between a speaker’s identity and the speaker’s words. “[T]here is the obvious but insufficiently appreciated fact,” writes Goffman, “that words we speak are often not our own, at least our current ‘own’” (3). Given the ease with which we can speak in the name of others, Goffman analyzed the role of speaker into a set of separable communicative modes, which together specify the nature of a speaker’s alignment with an utterance. When tutors represent audiences to their clients, they assume footings where their alignment with their words is indirect and refracted; for this reason, Goffman’s analysis of the speaker role provides a useful theoretical vocabulary for characterizing the forms and functions of represented audiences.

The tutorial dialogues that I recorded for this study were sessions between tutors and clients who were writing personal statements for medical school applications. These were rich occasions for analyzing audience representations for two reasons. For one, clients came to these consultations acutely aware of their need to impress their audience in a high-stakes rhetorical situation. For another, because the target audience was outside the institution and therefore inaccessible, tutors had to draw inferences about the audience from their own knowledge and the knowledge of their clients.

In his landmark essay, “The Idea of a Writing Center,” Stephen North urged writing center researchers to identify the features of tutor talk that distinguish it from other forms of educational support available to student writers: “If the writing center is ever to prove its worth in other than quantitative terms . . . it will have to do so by describing [tutor] talk: what characterizes it, what effects it has, how can it be enhanced” (444). Of North’s three research directives, my study addresses the first: the character of tutor talk. What I hope to demonstrate in this article is that representing audiences is not only characteristic of tutor talk; it is instrumental to achieving its aims. When not the target audience, a tutor can act instead as a moving target, instantiating various forms of audience to help a client measure his or her intentions for a text against the tutor’s live reception of it.

Study Context and Data Collection

The tutorial dialogues analyzed here came from consultations during which tutors worked with clients writing personal statements for medical school applications. Premed students at my former university, which has no medical school on its campus, are supported by the Health Professions Office (HPO). HPO staff members assist premeds with the preparation of applications, but they will review an applicant's personal statement only after it is finished and nearly ready to submit. Applicants who desire guidance in the drafting stage are referred to the writing center, and they come to the center in large numbers. In summer 2004, the term in which I carried out this study, nearly one-third of all visitors sought help with a personal statement, for a total of 290 consultations across the term.

Applicants submit one online application to all public medical schools, in the statewide system, to which they wish to apply. Below is the application's prompt for the personal statement:

In your own words, explain your motivation to seek a career in MEDICINE. Discuss your philosophy of the medical profession and indicate your goals relevant to the profession [Limited to 62 lines and 80 characters per line].
(Texas)

Although it is impossible to know how much weight the personal statement carries relative to other parts of an applicant's file (GPA, MCAT scores, letters of recommendation), there is reason to believe that admissions officers give them due consideration, particularly in cases where applicants are close to parity by other measures (Jones and Baer 1).

The Barron's guide *Essays That Will Get You Into Medical School*, available at both the writing center and HPO, takes an audience-based approach in its advice to applicants. Chapter One, "Assess Your Audience," quotes an anonymous admissions officer who has this to say about evaluating personal statements:

The members of a medical admissions committee are responsible for choosing the next generation of doctors. These are the people who will be healing our children, curing us and our parents, and literally saving lives. Put it in that perspective and the responsibility we feel is enormous. For

this reason, we're going to choose to accept someone we feel we know, trust, and like. (Kaufman, Dowhan, and Burnham 7)

If this admissions officer is at all representative of others, then it would seem that those who read personal statements do take them seriously, even *personally*. Chapter One concludes with this recommendation: "It is imperative that you get feedback about your essays before submitting your final versions" (12).

Given this recommendation it is not surprising that many applicants seek help at the writing center. They know that they must set themselves apart from the crowd of competitors, but not for any reason that might set off alarms in a reader growing bleary from "file fatigue." For their part, tutors do not have recourse to refer clients directly to the target audience as they normally do for coursework papers. For tutors the challenge is how to anticipate the expectations of readers who are absent from the scene of consultation and whose exact identities are unknown.

After having my research proposal approved by the university's Institutional Review Board, I recruited twelve clients and twelve tutors to participate. Clients learned about my study from a recruiting flyer made available at HPO. I accepted the first twelve persons who contacted me; thus all participating clients were self-selected. Each was paid \$10 for participating. The twelve tutors were all graduate students in the humanities who had worked many terms in the writing center, including summers. None had ever applied to medical school, but they had all read many personal statements during their summer work. I observed and audio-recorded all twelve sessions, which lasted forty-five minutes on average.

Overview of Theory

In his essay "Footing," reprinted in the collection *Forms of Talk*, Goffman explores the nature of participant involvement in social interaction. *Footing* is the term he assigns to the relationship between a person's identity and what that person says in interaction. "The alignment of an individual to a particular utterance," writes Goffman, "can be referred to as his *footing*" (227). The concept of footing has been applied by discourse analysts to an array of social interactions:

from public occasions such as televised news interviews (Clayman) and courtroom cross-examinations (Hartland) to private occasions such as young boys' sports play (Hoyle) and family conversations involving pets (Tannen, "Talking the Dog").

Rather than maintain a single, static footing for the duration of an interaction, it is far more common, says Goffman, for participants to shift their footing in the give and take of conversation. But to characterize such shifts as simply changing from one footing to another does not account for the subtle interplay of footings that sometimes occurs:

I have dealt till now with changes in footing as though the individual were involved merely in switching from one stance or alignment to another. But this image is itself too mechanical and too easy. . . . For it seems that when we change voice—whether to speak for another aspect of ourselves or for someone else . . . we are not so much terminating the prior alignment as holding it in abeyance with the understanding that it will almost immediately be reengaged. . . . And within one alignment, another can be fully enclosed. (155)

Although writing center scholars do not use the term "footing" or refer to shifts in footing when describing the work of effective tutoring, they sometimes speak in terms that sound quite similar. As one scholar put it, "Playing a variety of narrative roles, writing center tutors find themselves involved in a dynamic performance in which rules and roles shift" (Hemmeter 38). Managing this dynamic performance, however, is no mean feat, as Muriel Harris has acknowledged: "I might add that part of the success—and the exhaustion—one feels from tutoring is the need to change hats in mid-sentence" ("The Roles" 63). To play a variety of roles, to change hats in mid-sentence—these are the kind of conversational dynamics that depend in part on tutors' capacity for nimble shifts of footing.

To understand better what Goffman means by shifts of footing, it will help to consider a concrete example. This example comes from a study of tutorial dialogue conducted by writing center researchers Blau, Hall, and Strauss. In their study the researchers sought to identify the linguistic strategies by which tutors facilitated (or at times thwarted) collaboration with their clients. Although representing

audiences was not a strategy featured in their analysis, they do comment on one such representation in an instance of thwarted collaboration. Below are the transcribed lines of interest followed by the authors' commentary:

Tutor: You could write around it. You could say, "A national study involving four hundred and thirty schools nationwide showed . . ." but only if you want to. It's your choice (laughs). If I was a teacher, though, I would say, "What board of education?" (25)

By the end of this exchange, the tutor is clearly frustrated with the client not taking her advice to check the accuracy of the term and goes as far as to create a hypothetical teacher to take on the burden of the direct question "What board of education?" This is a creative way to skirt the issue of being too directive in the session. While maintaining the role of non-directive collaborator, this tutor invents a sterner and more directive persona (teacher) to ask the direct question that she feels is outside her role. (26)

This example illustrates what Goffman means by a speaker "not so much terminating [a] prior alignment as holding it in abeyance with the understanding that it will almost immediately be reengaged" (155). By taking the footing of a hypothetical teacher, the tutor manages to pose a direct question without forsaking her previous footing as a facilitator. This momentary shift of footing allows her to steer a middle course between two tutorial objectives: 1) to respect the client's autonomy over his text; 2) to tip the client off to a problem he has not recognized. To harmonize these two objectives, however, is not always easy; here the tutor effects a compromise by alternating her footing: she invokes a hypothetical heavy to keep her own touch light.

In addition to shifts of footing, this example illustrates another observation that Goffman makes in "Footing" that figures importantly in my analysis. Because we can "as handily quote another (directly or indirectly) as we can say something in our own name," as did the tutor, Goffman argues that the role of speaker should be analyzed into a set of discrete communicative modes (3). While *speaker* is perfectly serviceable as a folk term, a finer terminology is needed to specify the precise alignment between an interlocutor and his or her

utterance.

Goffman thus decomposes the role of speaker into three isolable modes: 1) *animator*, 2) *author*, and 3) *principal*. The animator gives voice to the utterance, or, as Goffman puts it, the animator is the “sounding box” (144). The author selects the words that make up an utterance. And the principal espouses the belief behind an utterance. It is the principal “whose position is established by the words” and “who is committed to what the words say” (144). Together, these three modes comprise what Goffman calls the *production format*. While all three modes can and often do coincide with the person of the speaker, there are exceptions, the example above being a case in point.

When the tutor speaks in the name of a hypothetical teacher, she embodies the mode of animator, but the modes of author and principal are consigned to the fictive persona of the teacher. Because she delivers her comment as a line of constructed dialogue (Tannen, *Talking Voices*), the tutor’s association with her utterance is subjunctive: she is not the teacher, only the teacher’s mouthpiece.

When tutors take the footings of represented audiences, they organize the production format such that the modes of animator, author, and principal do not coincide fully with the person of the tutor; therefore, Goffman’s concepts of footing and the production format provide a useful analytical vocabulary for specifying the form and function of audience representations in tutor talk.

Method of Analysis

After observing and recording the twelve tutorial dialogues, I proceeded to devise a method for analyzing the forms and functions of audiences that tutors represented to their clients. My first step was to determine what qualified as a represented audience, and here I took my cue from Goffman by looking to those occasions where tutors spoke “for another aspect of [themselves] or for someone else” when talking to their clients (155). These were occasions when tutors shifted temporarily to the self-designated footing of a reader, a footing that was related to, but not synonymous with, the tutor’s own identity. At such moments, tutors did not embody the modes of animator, author, and principal in perfect coincidence; instead, by speaking for or as a reader, they organized the communicative modes

in alignment with the audience they were momentarily representing to the client.

After establishing a working definition for a represented audience, I then developed a scheme for categorizing these audiences according to their referential orientation to the tutor. In Figure 1, referential orientation is depicted two-dimensionally by an axis that points in one direction toward the tutor’s *self* and in the other direction toward an *other*, or third party. Proximate to the self are forms of audience footing that represented “another aspect” of the tutor’s identity; grammatically, these audiences were instantiated with first-person nominals: e.g., *I as a reader* or *we*. Farther from the self, and thus nearer the *other*, were those forms of footing that represented “someone else”; grammatically, these audiences were instantiated with third-person nominals: e.g., *readers*, *your audience*, or *they*. When representing first-person audiences, tutors were generally more closely allied with the modes of the production format (animator, author, principal) than they were when representing third-person audiences. With third-person audiences, the modes of the production format tended to be outsourced to the discourse entity that tutors had posited in the conversational context.

I then further divided the categories of first-person and third-person audiences into two subcategories for a total of four distinct forms of audience footing: 1) first-person qualified, 2) first-person expanded, 3) third-person hypothesized, 4) third-person identified.

Referential Orientation			
self ←		→ other	
First Person		Third Person	
Qualified	Expanded	Hypothesized	Identified
Ex. “Well, I’ll tell you my perception as a reader . . .”	Ex. “So we’ve basically gotten that your mom’s a doctor . . .”	Ex. “Alluding to it but not explaining it might confuse readers . . .”	Ex. “I agree with HPO about giving more concrete details . . .”

Figure 1. Forms of Audience Footing

In the following analysis I define each form of audience footing and illustrate it with examples drawn from my data. I discuss the communicative functions that these footings served in their immediate conversational context. Given the descriptive aim of the study and my desire to illustrate a variety of communicative functions, my examples are admittedly selective rather than exhaustive. In my transcription of dialogue excerpts, I have followed the conventions developed by Gail Jefferson that are widely used in conversational analysis (Atkinson and Heritage). A key to transcription symbols is provided in an appendix. For each excerpt, an arrow (→) indicates where a shift of footing occurs. Tutors and clients go unnamed in the interest of confidentiality.

Analysis of Data

First-Person Qualified

This audience footing takes the grammatical form of the first-person singular pronoun “I” accompanied by the qualifying phrase “as a reader.” Though referentially proximate to the tutor, this audience footing is not aligned with the person of the tutor, but with the tutor’s self-assigned role as a reader. By taking this footing, a tutor momentarily transforms a dialogue between a tutor and client into a triangulated discussion involving a reader, a writer, and a text.

The first example of a first-person qualified footing comes at a point in a consultation shortly after the tutor has finished reading her client’s text aloud. Returning to the top, the tutor pauses in her rereading of the second paragraph to interject a comment.

Tutor: Since the age of five I have been obsessively interested in the structure and function of the human body [pause] Um, I liked it- I have to say [pause we’re not supposed to evaluate your work and say what we like and don’t, but I am going to talk about it as if I’m pretending to be your
→ audience. As a reader I found, I found these early stories really fun and they kind of made me smile because I can imagine thi- pardon me for sayin- but maybe quirky child
< Because not all kids >

when you get into these areas we're talking
about almost like matters of taste to a certain
< degree. How something >

Client: < Yeah. That's true. >

Tutor: sounds to someone else.
Repeating the word *problem* there wasn't a problem for me=

Client: =[laughter]=

Tutor: =because, you know, repetition of a word can either get
annoying if you use it over and over again in many sentences
or it can bring a kind of emphasis, and it did the
< latter for me here. >

Client: < Okay. I see. >

Though similar in form to the last, the footing here serves a somewhat different communicative function. If the last tutor assumed her footing to separate her role as a reader from her role as a tutor, this tutor separates himself as a reader from other readers. In terms of Goffman's production format, the tutor embodies all modes at once— animator, author, and principal—but the authority of the principal is qualified as the product of one individual's subjective perception.

While the client's question presumes that repetition is a flaw in need of fixing, the tutor's reply calls that presumption into question. The first half of his reply is a proviso, which he delivers from a first-person qualified footing, saying, in effect, that there is no judgment-free answer to the client's question. As the matter cannot be decided objectively, the tutor takes care to qualify his opinion as predicated on his impression. One might say that the tutor uses his footing here to “bring a kind of emphasis” of his own: he emphasizes *how* the text strikes him as a reader, not *what* the text ought to say. Though he gives a reasoned reply to the client's question, he ultimately leaves it up to her to decide whether or not “problem” is really a problem.

First-Person Expanded

The second type of first-person footing takes the grammatical form

of the first-person plural pronoun “we.” I call it *expanded* because its scope of reference extends beyond the tutor to include others. As with any pronoun, the referents for “we” vary with the context of utterance. The important variable for “we” is whether the addressee is included in its reference:

Addressee inclusive: $WE = I_{\text{speaker}} + YOU_{\text{addressee}} + / - THEM_{\text{other}(s)}$

-or-

Addressee exclusive: $WE = I_{\text{speaker}} + THEM_{\text{other}(s)} - YOU_{\text{addressee}}$

On some occasions, though, the status of the addressee’s inclusion can be ambiguous: the addressee can either opt in or opt out of the compass of reference. The pronoun’s potential for flexible referentiality is exhibited in the examples I have drawn from my data.

These two examples of first-person expanded footing come from the same session, but they occurred at discontinuous moments.

Tutor: When my mom opened her own clinic Have you told- uh [pause]
→ my mother’s Merck manual [pause] my mom’s pager Right. So we’ve basically gotten that your mom’s a doctor.

Client: Yeah=

Tutor: =Right.

Client: Hopefully. [laughter]

[...]

Tutor: I might turn on the word philosophy there. Somehow use it like a
→ keyword that the reader will know, “Oh. Okay. We’re talking about philosophy of the medical profession.”

Client: What is a-, exactly how would I use the word philosophy?

Tutor: Um.

Client: Like [pause] Is it- [pause] Can I use it interchangeably with like *purpose* or like *intention*? You know, I’m just struggling with how to use the word philosophy.

In the first stretch of talk, the tutor checks with the client to see

whether he has assimilated the text's information correctly. By taking a first-person expanded footing, the tutor invites the client to join him in his self-monitoring; effectively, he turns what is normally a private mental operation into a joint dialogic activity. The invitational function of the footing depends on its grammatical form. (Imagine if the tutor had used the first-person singular instead: "So, I've basically gotten that your mom's a doctor." With this substitution, the utterance sounds less like an invitation and more like a challenge to read the tutor's mind.) By taking this footing, the tutor opens up the mode of principal to include the client. If the principal is one "who is committed to what the words say" (Goffman 144), then the first-person expanded footing here invites the client to confirm that the belief stated is indeed true.

In the second stretch of talk, the first-person expanded footing also demonstrates the pronoun's potential for flexible referentiality. In this instance, because the tutor makes his comment in the form of constructed dialogue, he is only the animator of his words. Presumably, "we" refers to an imaginary reader reacting aloud to the text, but the referents for the pronoun are ambiguous. (Notice again how substituting "I" for "we" renders the comment patently odd; the only logical substitution for "we" is "she," referring to the client.) That the client understands that she is implied in "we" is evident in her reply: "What is a-, exactly how would I use the word philosophy?" The tutor's first-person footing is expandable in that the client can step in or out of its field of reference and thereby consider her text alternately as a reader and as a writer. Evidence that the first-person expanded footing encouraged input from the client is found in the balanced distribution of turn-taking in this exchange.

Third-Person Hypothesized

As compared to first-person audiences, third-person audiences lie at greater referential remove from the tutor. These audiences take the grammatical form of third-person entities: e.g., "they" or "your audience" or "an admissions committee." A third-person hypothesized audience is inferentially derived from the tutor's knowledge but is not referentially tied to the tutor's self.

The first example of a third-person hypothesized audience comes at a moment in a consultation where the tutor falters while reading the client's text.

Tutor: to think critically [pause] and to coherently communicate [pause]
We can talk about that. [pause] I mean, here you have to think critically so the adverb is afterwards and here you have it in
→ between to coherently communicate. That's what the grammar police call a split infinitive=

Client: =Gotcha.

Tutor: Which is not, I mean- [Tutor waits while the client makes an edit.]

Client: You want to stay away from that.

Tutor: Yeah, right. Exactly. It's one of things, split infinitives, that people are getting less and less sort of hyper about but on an application essay you might want to stick to the classic textbook rules because you don't know who your reader's going to be and how they're going to think about those kinds of things.

Here the tutor represents a hypothetical reader who hews to the rules of prescriptive grammar. In terms of Goffman's production format, the tutor is not the principal (i.e., a member of the "grammar police") but rather the author and animator: one who knows the rule and can explain it but need not enforce it. In fact, the mildly derisive reference to the grammar police distances the tutor from the sort of reader who would get "hyper" over such a matter. But because neither tutor nor client can predict what pet peeves the target audience may have, the tutor hypothesizes a grammatical stickler in the interest of playing it safe. By taking this footing, the tutor does not have to justify the logic of the rule; he only has to appeal to the rhetorical savvy of heeding it.

In the second example of a hypothesized third-person audience, the tutor is commenting on her client's reference to God in the following sentence: "Each of us has the responsibility to use our own God given gifts and talents to the best of our ability."

Tutor: But I mean I don't want to say what you can't leave in here because you're supposed to put yourself in it. It's obviously a personal judgment call. You just have to be really aware of how it's going to → sound to an admissions committee and make sure that you're not, um, that you're not, um [pause] that you're not sounding to them like, um, you wouldn't be a good candidate. Maybe their concern in general would be that you wouldn't be invested in scientific inquiry. Right? Because there are certain branches of Christianity < that aren't >

Client: < Oh, well >

Tutor: that aren't invested in scientific inquiry=

Client: =I guess=

Tutor: =And so, I guess I'm trying to articulate what their concern would be-

Client: Well, I know what you're saying sort of, like embryonic stem cell research. Things like that?

Compared to the previous example, this third-person audience is characterized in a way that is far more particular to the medical profession. The tutor suggests that the client's reference to "God given gifts" may raise a red flag for a reader committed to the scientific method and the materialist worldview it entails. That the tutor has broached a touchy subject is evident in the overlaps and interruptions that punctuate the latter part of this exchange. The tutor takes care to distance herself from the mode of principal, and even in the mode of author, she struggles for the right words to express the principal's view: "And so, I guess I'm trying to articulate what their concern would be."

Considered together, the two examples of hypothesized audiences demonstrate how these audiences can vary in the way they are situated and specified. Whereas a hardnosed grammarian embodies knowledge potentially possessed by any literate individual, a secular materialist embodies knowledge aligned with a particular

kind of epistemology. A third-person hypothesized audience, because it is a speculative construct, is a useful footing for representing an indeterminate audience such as a medical school admissions committee. To speak metaphorically, one might call such a footing a discursive variety of dressmaker's form, to which tutors can pin a supposition and clients can observe the drape.

Third-Person Identified

The final form of footing is a third-person identified audience. Unlike a third-person hypothesized audience, this audience is not a product of inference but an identifiable person outside the writing center setting, someone who has previously read the client's text or someone to whom the tutor can refer the client. This audience lies at the *other* extreme on the axis of referential orientation and is the footing farthest from the tutor's self.

The first example of a third-person identified audience comes from a consultation with a client who had met with an HPO advisor just before coming to the writing center. In the margins of her statement were notes she had taken during that meeting. It is these notes that the tutor refers to in the following exchange.

Tutor: The last thing that I would say [pause] and I think probably almost
→ exactly what it seems that your previous reader said=

Client: =Yes.

Tutor: Which is that you have a lot to say about motivation=

Client: =Um-hmm=

Tutor: =A lot to say about your background, your experiences, right?
This essay is ninety percent backward looking, right?

Client: Um-hmm

Tutor: And if you look at the prompt here motivation but then philosophy of the medical profession=

Client: =Right.

Tutor: That's only implicit here.

In reiterating the previous reader's comment, as recorded in the margins of the text, the tutor merges his principal with that of the third-person identified audience. His view is not his alone but rather a consensus he creates by allying himself with the HPO advisor. In speaking from this allied footing, the tutor is less the author of his own words than he is the animator of another's words. After the first line, the tutor all but effaces himself in favor of indexing the textual artifacts that surround the client's text. The tutor animates these resources—marginalia plus prompt—to make a comment about the client's text. He is able to deliver an objective assessment because he derives it from the objects available at hand.

The second example of a third-person identified audience comes toward the end of a consultation where the tutor initiates a closing sequence with a last call for questions.

Tutor: Well, do you have any other questions for me?

Client: [pause] Um, no.

Tutor: Okay. Was this [pause] *helpful*?

Client: Um, actually, how do you, I mean you've read other essays right?

Tutor: Uh-huh.

Client: So how does thi::s-

Tutor: That's a really hard question for me to answer because they're all very different. One of the things about personal statements is that they're all very different a::nd because the people who are writing them are all very different and in some respects
→ HPO might actually be in a better position to give you an answer on that than I am, um, because their job is to evaluate them and my job is to just sort of think about it as a reader, does this make sense? What does it tell me? What effect does
→ it have on me? So, as a reader I was interested in what you were saying. You told me things that were engaging. I wanted to know more about you and sort of more details and more specifics about, so how did this relate to him? What effect did

it have on him? You know, what was unusual about this? And
 → so those were my reactions as a reader. [pause] I think we
 are out of time. Um, if you feel like you would like to come
 into the writing center in addition to going to HPO you can
 make an appointment with the person at the front desk.

This example could have been alternatively discussed under the rubric of first-person qualified footing, but I have chosen to discuss it here because the tutor defines her own role as a reader in contradistinction to the third-person identified audience. Not only does the third-person footing (“HPO”) help define the first-person footing (“as a reader I”); it also allows her to defer the client’s request rather than deny it.

The tutor characterizes her role as that of a phenomenological reader, one who approaches a text on its own terms and does not make comparisons with other texts. The questions she permits herself to answer delineate a reader who is hemmed in by bureaucracy and bound to protocol. Even though she does not abdicate the modes of principal and author altogether, she thoroughly qualifies them: as principal, she only considers texts in isolation; as author, she only responds to a prescribed range of questions. By elaborating this heuristic of allowable questions, the tutor grants herself institutional backing to deflect her client’s request for evaluation.

But she does not leave it at that. After delivering her disclaimer, the tutor does offer some estimation of the client’s text within the strictures she has laid down for herself. After making a couple of general statements about his text, she poses a few questions that occurred to her as she read it. As she does, she switches from present tense to past tense and then from second-person to third-person pronouns: “And so those *were* my reactions as a reader”; “so how did this relate to *him*?” (my italics). The aggregate effect of these linguistic choices—interrogative mood, past tense, third-person pronouns—is to increase the interpersonal distance between tutor and client. The tutor does not so much address the client as recount her reaction to his textual self-representation.

There is one other matter about this example worthy of mention, the tutor’s resumption of her prior footing near the end of the

excerpt: “And so those were my reactions as a reader. [pause] I think we are out of time.” In the space of a pause, the tutor ceases to speak as a reader and resumes her footing as a tutor, an *unqualified* “I” who completes the closing sequence initiated at the start. This shift of footing illustrates well what Goffman means when he remarks that “within one alignment, another can be fully enclosed” (155). In this excerpt we see how the tutor encloses a temporary footing as a reader within her sustained footing as a tutor. By keeping this unqualified, tutorial “I” intact—and distinct from audiences that she represents—the tutor maintains her control over the consultation. When Muriel Harris wrote of tutors “chang[ing] hats in mid-sentence” (“The Roles” 63), it is probable that she had something like this moment in mind. A shift of footing, such as this one, is a conversational juncture where hat changing takes place. It is a discursive strategy that helps tutors enact various roles as needed while simultaneously preserving a constant identity: the one in charge of conducting the session.

Discussion

In this study I set out to describe the form and function of the audiences that tutors represent to their clients in consultations. Since a tutor comes to a client’s text as an unintended reader—that is, someone for whom the text was not expressly written—tutors can represent variant manifestations of audience to their clients. Following Goffman, I characterized these represented audiences as footings and devised a categorical scheme of four footings differentiated by their referential orientation to the tutor. Proximal to the tutor were first-person footings (qualified or expanded) where the tutor spoke “as a reader” or as a part of a “we.” At greater remove were third-person audiences (hypothesized or identified) where tutors spoke in the name of a third party—either a hypothetical “they” or a known audience outside the center. For each form of footing I adduced examples taken from consultations between tutors and clients who were writing medical school application essays. Analyzing these examples in context, with Goffman’s production format supplying an analytical vocabulary, I identified a variety of communicative functions that these footings served pursuant to tutorial aims.

With the presentation of data complete, now is the occasion to consider whether any correlation can be drawn from form to function: that is, are certain forms of audience footing more given than others to achieving certain communicative functions? While the modest number of examples presented here precludes any ironclad conclusions, the data do suggest, I believe, that first-person footings have a somewhat different utility as compared to third-person footings.

First-person footings are suited to giving the kind of reader response that Peter Elbow has called a “movie of the mind.” Here is how Elbow describes what it means to respond with a movie of the mind:

As a reader giving your reactions, keep in mind that you are not answering a timeless, theoretical question about the objective qualities of those words on that page. You are answering a time-bound, subjective but *factual* question: what happened to *you* when you read the words *this time*.” (85, author’s italics)

What Elbow recommends here is that readers try as much as possible to externalize text-processing as it occurs. The key is to respond purposely as *a* reader and to abandon any pretense of being *the* reader. To do this, Elbow counsels readers to respond in a spontaneous, subjective, and concrete manner: i.e., to verbalize the impressionistic effect of the writer’s words as they are encountered in real time.

The examples of first-person footings from my data do exhibit some characteristics of movies of the mind. This is especially true of the first example, the one where the tutor paused in her reading to express her fondness for the client’s stories: “As a reader I found, I found these early stories really fun and they *kind of* made me smile because I can imagine thi- pardon me for sayin- but maybe *quirky* child.” What the tutor describes here—having fun and smiling inside—is her emotional and imaginative experience with the client’s text. These mental phenomena, were they not made effable and vocalized by the tutor, would have remained hidden from the client.

Because much of text-processing occurs instantaneously and tacitly, narrating a movie of the mind is not an especially “natural”

way of responding to a text. What a first-person qualified footing does is provide a discursive means of tying a movie of the mind into the flow of conversation. When speaking *as a reader*, tutors not only make an internal phenomenon verbally manifest; they also stamp their remark as the product of an individual consciousness.

Similarly, a first-person expanded footing also seems suited to vocalizing a tutor's real-time reaction to a client's text, but the plurality of "we" has the added potential of turning an individual act of text-processing into an interactive one. In the two examples I analyzed of first-person expanded footings, "we" gave tutor and client a grammatical handle on audience, a pronoun to think aloud with. This footing's tendency toward collaboration was evinced by the even distribution of talking turns between tutor and client. Of all the examples analyzed, these two were the most dialogic, which suggests that the inclusive referentiality of this footing may encourage client participation.

If first-person footings are suited to providing a movie of the mind, then third-person footings are suited to speculating about the minds of others. This is especially true of third-person hypothesized audiences, which are imaginative projections on the part of tutors. In both examples of third-person hypothesized audiences that I analyzed, the tutors sought to make their clients aware of possible objections that the target audience might have to their texts. In a sense, the tutors were playing the part of an unsympathetic reader, the sort of reader that Plato's Socrates feared. The grammar police and the secular materialist were two species of this unsympathetic reader—skeptical and judgmental, each in its own way.

In terms of communicative utility, third-person hypothesized audiences are useful for drawing a distinction between *expression* and *evocation*. This distinction is one that Margaret Atwood makes in an essay titled "An End to Audience." Atwood writes, "Maybe the writer *expresses*; but *evocation*, calling up, is what writing does for the reader" (32, author's italics). What I take Atwood to mean here is that expression is what a writer intends for a text to say, whereas evocation is what the text touches off in the mind of a reader. Evocations are not to be found in the text itself because they are brought to the text by those who read it. Evocations are thus ultimately out of a writer's

control; at best, a writer can only predict what they may be.

What the two tutors accomplished by taking a third-person hypothesized footing was to anticipate potential negative evocations in the target audience. These evocations were ones that may never have occurred to the clients on their own. When one tutor spoke for the grammar police, he was alerting his client to a possible negative reaction from a reader acquainted with the rules of prescriptive grammar: “you don’t know who your reader’s going to be and how they’re going to think about those kinds of things.” Likewise, when the other tutor remarked about her client’s mention of “God given gifts,” she put the matter in terms much like evocation: “You just have to be really aware of how it’s going to sound to an admissions committee and make sure that you’re not [. . .] sounding to them like, um, you wouldn’t be a good candidate.” To say that a text can sound to the target audience in a manner unpredicted by the writer is one way of talking about evocation.

What also makes a third-person hypothesized footing useful for couching remarks about evocations is that it allows tutors to voice them without simultaneously having to claim them for their own. Instead, they can assign an evocation to a hypothetical audience and then speculate about that audience’s possible reaction to it. A third-person footing helps tutors manage the instructional and interpersonal dimensions of tutorial: they can raise a rhetorical concern without endangering their rapport with clients. By assuming a third-person hypothetical footing, tutors can *stand in* for a skeptical or judgmental reader yet not have to *stand for* what they impute to that reader.

Having drawn these generalizations about the correlation of form to function, I do not want to overstate the case. The correlation between form and function is far from determinate. To exemplify this indeterminacy, one need only compare the first excerpt, in which the tutor praised her client’s stories, to the final one, in which the tutor declined to evaluate her client’s text. Both of these tutors assumed a first-person qualified footing, but they did so to opposite effect: one tutor relaxed the prohibition against evaluation to attend to her client’s affective needs; the other tutor invoked the same prohibition to politely refuse her client’s request.

However different the outcome, these two examples do have one thing in common: the tutors assumed an audience footing to exercise their personal judgment. If tutors are to remain adaptive to individual circumstances presented by their clients, then writing center policies—such as the policy against evaluation—can never be followed with legalistic rigidity (not as long as tutors also have reason to bolster clients' confidence with positive feedback). On the other hand, neither should policy be flouted. What footing audiences does is open up a margin for case-by-case judgment in a tutor's observance of writing center policy.

Directions for Further Research

Subsequent inquiry into the phenomenon of representing audiences in writing tutorials could follow one of two possible directions. One possibility would be to study the same phenomenon in a different rhetorical situation. Rather than personal statement consultations, one could examine audience representations in consultations where the target audience is a teacher for whom the client is composing a paper. These consultations are the most common kind that tutors conduct. In contrast to the indefinite audience of an admissions committee, a teacher is a definite audience known to the client. In such cases, the third-person identified audience—i.e., the teacher who gave the assignment—could figure prominently, and even problematically, in the conversation between tutor and client. The policy against evaluating student work exists primarily on account of coursework paper consultations. Here is how Stephen North describes a writing center's obligation to teachers:

In all instances the student must understand that we support the teacher's position completely. . . . In practice, this rule means that we never evaluate or second-guess any teacher's syllabus, assignment, comments, or grades. (441)

What North says here is surely right, but it is also true that tutors are frequently asked by clients to decode assignment instructions and interpret marginal comments. This raises an interesting research question: how do tutors represent an absent teacher to clients in

a way that prompts them to ask questions about audience without calling the teachers' authority into question?

Another possibility for subsequent research would be to examine represented audiences from the client's perspective. This study showed that a first-person expanded footing can encourage client participation, but this tells us very little about how clients represent audiences to their tutors. Many questions remain: How often do clients mention audience as a concern at the start of consultation? Do clients represent audiences with greater frequency when tutors assume audience footings themselves? Does jointly constructing an audience in conversation with a tutor make a client more attuned to audience when he/she writes? This last question crosses over from North's first research directive—what characterizes tutor talk?—to his second—what effects does it have? (444). To answer such a question would, of course, require a methodology more multifaceted than discourse analysis alone. However, since tutor-client interaction lies at the heart of all writing center instruction, any lasting benefit to tutorial for clients will have had its origin somewhere in the details of our discourse.

NOTES

1. Here are the relevant lines from *Phaedrus* in Hackforth's translation:

And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to help, being unable to defend or help itself." (Plato 158; lines 268-275)

APPENDIX: Transcription Key

Symbol	Meaning
-	interrupted or aborted utterance
=	latching (no pause between speakers' turns)
< >	speakers' overlapping speech
<i>italics</i>	rising intonation
<u>underline</u>	emphatic stress
:	prolongation of pronunciation
“ ”	reported speech or constructed dialogue
<u><u>double underline</u></u>	reading aloud
...	transcriber's omission
[laughter]	transcriber's insertion

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