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Literature Self Study

In an era of information explosion, my everyday life is full of information passed by various mediums. I get in touch with literacies even unconsciously. It can be hard to notice that the way I process academic and non-academic works of literature are different due to how I label them. When I listen to one of my favorite songs or watch my favorite talk show, I am well-prepared to enjoy it. With my interest, I am very likely to dig into their backgrounds to get to know more. Indeed, the modes of communication of music and shows evoke the interests and emotions of audiences and make it an easier way to convey messages. But when approaching academic readings, the term “academic” already defines that it requires intense thinking and analyzing, which can be the significant difference between academic and non-academic processes. From my observations, I observed a lot of unique ways of composing an academic reading. But it is still tough to possess information academically, no matter which modes of communication the authors adapt to reduce the hardness. Therefore, I believe academics and non-academics can be very similar in communicating with audiences while having a massive difference in the types of audiences or genres and the intensity of information.

I read a biological research paper titled “Manufacture of Mammalian Cell Biopharmaceuticals” by Jinyou Zhang. The writers adapt data and diagrams to explain his research process perfectly within a proper length. He tries to squeeze the entire research into a

15-page paper, making it so hard for me to read that I read word by word but still go back several times for the same sentence. Then I realized the background of the author and the purpose of his paper already limit the intended audience. The audience could be biological researchers, students, and people interested in pharmaceutical production with sufficient knowledge and background limited to the linguistic mode of the paper, but not someone who never cares about science. Professional words make the paper difficult to understand. For example, the author includes big words and terms such as “chromatography resin capacity”, “microfiltration”, and so on. However, the accurate description of the experiment leaves large freedom for any researchers or students who want to learn and replicate his research.

In comparison, the talk show I watched by Mo Welch is very different. A talk show is much more flexible with its intended audience than a research paper on a specific subject. The talk show is called “Straight Women Are Going Extinct.” During the talk show, Welch includes many humorous words and jokes to create a comfortable atmosphere for audiences. She mentioned her experience of seeing her straight female friend worried about if the man she was going on the first date was a murderer. As a lesbian, Welch points out that she had never worried that any girl she dated might threaten her. The gesture and interactions she uses to make it even more ironic. She raised her voice and paused to wait for the audience to laugh. The audience for this talk show could be anyone, especially lesbians, and with the online platform, it spreads quickly.

Comparing those two identical academic and non-academic literature, I realize that each has its purpose or audience that requires specific modes of communication or other techniques. Like what had been mentioned in “How to Read like a writer” by Mike Bunn, whether it is a text or a show, the techniques behind it are closely connected to its intended audience, and sometimes

authors compose work to make readers learn their methods. Once the modes of composition are working, the literacies convey their message successfully. In the research paper, Zhang applies linguistic modes and visual modes. In the talk show, Welch uses gestural and aural modes on the base of linguistic and visual. Academic work has more dense information and uses the modes of composition that are best for their limited audience. Non-academic literacies are more flexible or creative because there are not many limitations to their intended audience. Their purpose also varies.

Academic and non-academic are distinct in the way of thinking of the audience. Take my class notes as an example. For my biology class notes, I suppose it is in the middle of academic and non-academic literature. Because it is unlike the real academic readings that are complicated and professional; instead, it comprises many diagrams and annotations and even funny quotes or tags to help me memorize knowledge. Therefore, it is dense in information but flexible in communication, which is another crucial difference I want to point out. The primary purpose of writing notes is to make myself memorize things, which should be clear enough for review. Considering no other audience except myself leads to a more creative and dynamic way of writing. The funny quotes and tags give a more profound impression of terms, and the space between each topic makes it easier to see. Constituting visual, spatial, and linguistic modes, I am trying to convert the dense knowledge I gained into simple parts. Then I realized that my overall thinking process changed with the term “academic.” Academics need to be professional, precise, and productive, so there is much less joy. Knowing the intended audience and limitations is the ticket to mastering specific subjects. I always feel like I need to know enough to enjoy studying a specific subject and improve finally. This feeling is very similar to what I think about my favorite song: “No Body, No Crime” by Taylor Swift. It is country music, and the lyrics are

about a crime story. Taylor uses metaphor and describes it in the third person. At first, as an international student knowing nothing about country music, I am confused about the genre and story. I understood it after researching country music and the music background. Breaking into a group interested in a particular music genre is as same as learning a subject. The only difference is the attitude. I can still sing along to a song even know nothing about its background, but I must master what I have learned.

The limited intended audience and purpose limit academic work because the authors are trying to ensure they get the right things to teach and the specific responses they want. Non-academic processes aim at many different audiences and are therefore willing to take any responses. There is no right or wrong in the non-academic process. In conclusion, multimodal composing of academic and non-academic literature is influenced by their audiences and purposes, but they can be similar. The actual difference is the intention of the audience and how they respond to academic or non-academic literature.