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# An Exploration of Voice in Second Language Writing

Dwi Riyanti

**Abstract:** Writing with strong voice is desirable in the U.S mainstream culture, yet it is not necessarily easy to accomplish it. This is even harder for second language writers who are new to the culture. The different cultural expectation and the knowledge of the language presumably become some of the obstacles for them to write in the expectation of the U.S mainstream. Even the notion of voice in writing itself is often confusing. This paper, focusing on exploring what voice is and how it is manifested in second language writing, reviews related literature on voice and second language writing research as well the author's experience being an international student who has to write for the U.S mainstream audience. The findings show that the concept of voice itself is broadly defined to refer to many things, adding confusion to novice second language writers who are trying to fit to the expectation of the intended audience. Additionally, the struggles that second language writers experience in writing with strong voice are triggered by many factors which are not necessarily lacking of the knowledge of the language. The insight of the challenges that second language writers have may give implications on how second language writing instruction should focus.

**Key words:** *voice in writing, second language writers, academic writing, second language instruction*

## Introduction

For a second language (L2) writer like myself, the term “voice” as it relates to writing is confusing. As I rarely talk about writing with voice in my first language, I am not accustomed to consider whether I write with voice or not. When I first heard the term “voice” used to describe writing, I immediately assumed it to mean the message that writers want to convey through their written pieces. While it can be partially true, the term, in

fact, can mean more than that. This is partly because voice is often interpreted in various ways. For example it can mean “style, persona, stance or ethos” (Bowden, 1995, p. 173). Additionally, the term “voice” in writing has never been defined clearly, despite its broad use to refer to “authors’ writing styles, authorship, language registers, rhetorical stance, written and spoken prosody, the self in the text, and scores of others” (Sperling & Appleman, 2011, p. 70). While the term in the U.S mainstream contexts has been a common topic in writing, the lack of consensus to what it is about, how it is assessed, and by whom it is assessed complicate the notion of voice in writing.

As an international student and a second language (L2) writer myself, I find my writing is different from native-American English writers. Realizing that I write differently makes me wonder if I write with voice. If I refer to Bowden’s definition of voice, I feel that I do write with voice because I write with certain styles. Yet, it is not necessarily true that people from the U.S mainstream culture think that I write with strong voice. While none of my professors have ever commented that my writing has voice, I could sense that my writing is very straight forward and lacks details which I think are an indication of weak voice. Additionally, my unfamiliarity with the cultural norms commonly adopted by native speakers of English and my limited English vocabulary may be some of the causes that my writing may not be perceived as having strong voice. This has often led me to conclude that I write with lack of or even no voice at all when I write in my L2. While this can be a generalization to use myself as an example of a struggling L2 writer, lack of clear voice in writing may also be a problem that other L2 writers encounter.

Considering the possible confusion about the notion of voice for L2 writers, this paper is aimed at exploring the concept of voice in writing from various different theoretical perspectives, how it functions in writing, and how it is manifested in L2 writing. This paper will review literature about what has been researched related to the notion of voice. While it is hoped that the exploration can be beneficial for other second language writers who are still struggling to write with clear voice as expected by U.S mainstream culture, this conceptual exploration can also be worthwhile

for writing teachers or educators to get some ideas about the struggle that L2 writers encounter in integrating voice in their writing. Lastly, the implications for teaching writing to L2 learners can also be useful insight for English as second language or English language learning teachers.

### **Definition of voice**

The notion of voice in spoken interaction has been defined as part of people's identity markers in which people's unique voice can differentiate them from others (Bowden, 1995; Ivanic & Camps, 2001). It is considered to be part of a person's identity because people who are familiar with the person can recognize who they are only by hearing their voice. Voice has also been used in specific ways to emphasize the messages people are trying to convey. The different pitches and tones often determine kinds of messages that speakers want to address. Using a soft voice, for example, may indicate powerlessness or helplessness that the speakers have in reacting to particular unexpected situations. On the other hand, using a loud voice may signal anger, suppression or power exertion. A flat voice may signal boredom or the absence of enthusiasm. Therefore, variations in how voice is produced signals differences in the meaning being conveyed.

Unlike the relatively clear role of voice in speaking, voice in writing is more complex as the features of voice identified in spoken interaction are not as clear as in written forms. For example, one of the characteristics of writing is that it does not carry phonetic and prosodic qualities of the identities of the writers (Ivanic & Camps, 2001), recognizing the voice that writers have is not as easy as recognizing it in someone's speech. However, it does not mean that voice does not exist in writing. According to Ivanic and Camps (2001), voice does exist in written language, and it is "the heart of the act of writing" (Kirby, Kirby, & Liner, 2004, p. 76). In a similar vein, Hyland (2002) argues that "writing always has voice in the sense that it conveys a representation of a writer" (p. 5). Synthesizing what have been argued by aforementioned authors, it can be concluded that voice in writing does matter and it tells something about who the writer is.

In line with Ivanic and Camps (2001) and Hyland (2002), Elbow (2007) argues that *voice in writing* refers to the true self and the rhetorical power, and that everyone has capacity to write with power as he or she has voice. Elbow's argument shows that voice does exist in writing and that writing with voice is very important. While Elbow theorizes the notion of voice as individual rhetorical power in writing, other researchers such as Kinloch (2010) and Brooke (2012) use the notion of voice to refer to a broader concept that involves the writers' social contexts. Kinloch (2010), for example, shows in her research with adolescents from Harlem that non-mainstream adolescents were able to participate in community action projects by integrating their voice into their writing. Through their critical narrative writing, the adolescents in Kinloch's study were able to project their strong voice in order to more effectively represent their community. Similarly, Brooke (2012) has also shown that voice in writing really matters, because it can be used to raise community issues related to place based education. While the concept of voice in these two examples of how adolescents write with voice in Kinloch's and Brooke's studies differs from what Elbow (2007) argues, it shows that voice in writing can be social in nature as well as self-representative.

Even though the notion of voice in writing is still under debate (Bowden, 1995), most experts in the field are in agreement that voice is an important component of writing. Additionally, voice is also claimed to have correlation with the quality of writing (Zhao & Llosa, 2008). Similar to the notion of voice in spoken interaction in which it is part of the identity markers of the speakers, voice in writing also serves similar functions related to the identity of the writers. Hyland (2008) argues that "as writers we show who we are by the choices we make in our texts in much the same way that our speech, clothes, and body languages index our social class" (p.6), indicating that voice in writing tells something about the writers. Similarly, Ivanic and Camps (2001) affirm that despite the absence of the phonetic and prosodic quality of speech, the identity of the authors can still be recognized through the lexical, syntactical, and organizational aspects that any authors use in their writing.

## **Voice in different theoretical perspectives**

Unlike voice in spoken interaction which is often identified as one of the features of verbal communication, the notion of voice in writing is often seen metaphorically (Bowden, 1995; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Sperling & Appleman, 2011). Within this perspective, voice can refer to an ideology of worldview in communication that is widely used especially in the U.S mainstream where the notion of voice often refers to the uniqueness of self (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). With the acknowledgment of self in writing, the authors may use pronoun “I” in their writing as the manifestation of their uniqueness as individuals. Contrary to Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999), Bowden (1995) argues that voice is “simply an analogy, a way of saying that the voice of the writer can be perceived on paper as readily as if the words had been spoken” (p.173). With this notion of voice, a piece of writing can project who the writer is and the stance the writer has. In line with this, voice has also been used metaphorically to denote human agency and identity (Sperling & Appleman, 2011).

While voice has been widely recognized as the identity of the writers, a clear and succinct definition of voice in writing is not found in literature. This is probably because of the differences that people have in understanding the notion of voice. Despite the differences in definition, voice in writing is theoretically divided into two broad categories (Prior, 2001; Sperling & Appleman, 2011). The first one is voice as individual accomplishment, and the other is voice as social/cultural construction. While there seems to be a dichotomy of the notion of voice, according to Prior (2001), voice can be simultaneously personal and social.

### **Voice as individual representativeness**

Within this category, voice has often been associated with ownership (Sperling & Sperman, 2011), true self and rhetorical power (Elbow, 2007). As the manifestation of self-representation in writing, voice has something to do with the style that a writer has as a marker of his or her own identity. Additionally, Sperling and Appleman (2011) argue that “the

connection of voice to the self supports the connection of writing as a kind of identity performance” (p. 72). Within this context, voice can be seen as individual accomplishment in which the writers manifest their true selves through the use of specific linguistic features in their writing. For example, individuals “create their unique voice through selecting and combining the linguistic resources available to them” (Johnstone, 2000, p. 417). Sperling and Appleman (2011) further argue that unlike voice in spoken interaction, where the uniqueness of self is manifested in the use of rhythms, stress, and intonation, voice as individual self in writing is achieved through the use of syntax and punctuation.

### **Voice as social/cultural construction**

In addition to voice as a self-representation, voice is also socially constructed. Voice in this sense is often connected to an ideology in which it relates to social and cultural power (Maranathan & Atkinson, 1999; Sperling & Appleman, 2011). The notion of voice as social and cultural construction is based on the idea that how individuals represent their identities is shaped by their society and their cultures (Sperling & Appelman, 2011). This is even more prominent in academic writing in which the ways individuals write are influenced and situated by the contexts where they have to write and who their audience is (Hyland, 2002). Unlike other types of writing, the notion of voice in academic writing is generally undesirable as readers often look for scientific evidence rather than merely an opinion (Hyland, 2002). However, it does not mean that voice does not exist in academic writing. Hyland (2002) further argues that the idea of voice in academic writing is essentially social than personal in the sense that writers in academic contexts often associate themselves toward particular groups rather than representing themselves as individuals. While it is still possible that the idea of voice as self-representation is manifested in academic writing, students’ writing may be constrained by their sociocultural contexts, such as school expectations and the discipline in which they write. For example, the notion of voice in hard sciences and engineering is often manifested in the absence of writers’ self-representation as writers

in these disciplines often downplay their personal role in highlighting the issue they are studying. On the other hand, voice in the humanities discipline can be manifested in the use author's personal representation as personal involvement in the issue being studied is common (Hyland, 2002).

Voice as social and cultural construction is also tied to the Bakhtinian perspective in which any utterance is in response to a previous utterance and with anticipation of future utterances (Bakhtin, 1986). In this sense, voice is socially and culturally mediated. Within this context, writers always write in response to other voices. Thus, the voice in writing is not necessarily the voice of the writers themselves; rather, writers can use multiple voices in their writing. In line with sociocultural context of voice perspective, Hillocks (1995, p. xvii) argues that "writing is a recursive process that requires the reconstruction of text already written, so that what we add connects appropriately with what has preceded." This indicates that the act of writing itself is a social act which is done as a response to previous ideas. This affirms the notion of voice in the Bakhtinian perspective. Therefore, the voice that writers project in their writing is, in essence, socially constructed. Additionally, as writers construct their self-representation from drawing on culturally available resources when they write (Hyland, 2002), voice is social and cultural in nature.

### **The connection of voice and a sense of audience**

In line with the idea of voice as individual representation of self and socio-cultural achievement, voice in writing is connected to a sense of audience. According to Kirby, Kirby, and Liner (2004) "writers' choices of voice, language, and content are often influenced by their informed guesses about audience" (p.96). This clearly indicates that in order to write with strong voice, writers need to have a sense of audience or for whom their writing is intended. Additionally, as it is indicated by Sperling and Appleman (2011) that voice can refer to many things such as writing style, language register use, rhetorical stance and other things; therefore, it cannot be expected that writers will write using the same styles for different



audiences. For example, if I were supposed to write about my childhood memory to my professor, I would certainly use different writing style compared to if I were to write it to my close friends. That being said, the type of voice I use in writing is influenced by who the intended audience of the writing is.

### **Voice in L2 writing**

While the existence of voice is unarguably important, voice in L2 writing is not necessarily identified as the representation of the true self. This is specially the case for ESL learners writing in academic discourses and genres expected in U.S mainstream culture. L2 writers may use strong voice that shows authorial and self-representation in their first language (L1), yet the authorial voice may not be clearly present in their L2 writing. While this can mean that L2 writers write in the styles that are different from the expectation of audience in their L2 writing, it can also mean that L2 writers are not familiar with the expectation of their intended audience. In the study of identifying voice in L2 writing, Ivanic and Camps (2001) found that L2 writers use voice by positioning themselves in their writing. The positions that L2 writers choose are generally influenced by many factors resulting in their use of multiple voices in their writing. One of the factors that influence how the L2 writers represent themselves in their writing is the nature of the tasks or assignments they have to write. For example, in school contexts where most writing is produced in response to an assignment (Hillocks, 1995), the ways that L2 writers project their voices are often adjusted to the requirement for the assignments which are mostly for academic purposes. Since academic writing is often associated with anonymity of the writers, it is common that L2 writers avoid using the first person pronoun in their writing. This lack of first pronoun use may be seen as an indicator of lack of sense of self in the U.S mainstream contexts.

In the experience as an L2 writer myself, prior to coming to the U.S, I was taught that I had to distance myself from the object being described to write academically sound. This results in my reluctance to

write using the pronoun “I” even when I was prompted towards creative writing. While the ways L2 writers were taught affects how they write in their L2, the types of writing learned and taught shape how L2 writers write. For example, L2 learners who wish to continue their education in U.S universities tend to write in particular styles which do not necessarily fulfill the general expectation of U.S mainstream audiences. For international students who have to take standardized English entrance exams (e.g., TOEFL test) or other requirements for university entries, the type of writing they learned most of the time is to pass the TOEFL test and to get admission to the universities. This eventually shapes how they later write in their academic lives. Even though L2 students are also prepared to be able to write for participating in university study, the writing focus is usually adjusted to particular disciplines which have their own styles of writing. With this in mind, when L2 writers come to a country like the United States where the notion of voice as a representation of self in writing is pervasive, L2 writers often need to make adjustments to fulfill the expectation of the U.S mainstream culture. This often creates difficulties for L2 writers. For example, the use of pronoun “I” that is pervasively used both in creative writing and academic writing in U.S mainstream culture can be surprising for L2 writers coming from collective societies where the use pronoun “I” is rarely used in writing as indicated in Shen’s (1989) study.

Furthermore, L2 writers who come to the U.S for continuing their study at the university level are usually prepared to write in a neutral way. Thus, it is often difficult for them to write with a particular stance as their American counterparts often do. While this particularly refers to my own experience as a L2 writer, the study by Ivanic and Camps (2001) seems to confirm the idea that L2 writers tend to avoid the use of first person singular pronoun in their writing. Their study that focuses on investigating voice in six Mexican students studying in British universities shows a similar pattern in which the Mexican students feel reluctant to use first person singular pronoun in academic writing. While this is partly because they were taught not to use “I” in writing academic genres prior to their study in British universities, this is also because their supervisors want them to write it that way. While there might be different expectations between

American and British universities, this shows that the contexts influence the writing styles which inadvertently shape the voice that is reflected in L2 writing.

However, since the use of pronoun “I” is not the only predicator of using voice in writing, voice in writing can be identified by the use of other means, such as the use of other lexical choices, and how writers position themselves (Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Sperling & Appleman, 2011). While the use of the first person singular pronoun indicates the writer’s own voice, other voice indicators such as how writers position themselves in their writing can be used to indicate the writers’ stance which indirectly refers to the notion of voice in writing. Hyland (2002) argues that in order to capture the idea of voice in academic writing, ones should consider the voice as social rather than a personal representation. Thus, it makes sense that when Ivanic and Camps (2001) analyzed the use of voice in L2 academic writing, they identify three different types of writers’ positionings.

Among the three positioning types, Ivanic and Camps (2001) argue that *ideational positioning* is the most commonly used by L2 writers. Within this type of positioning, voice can be identified by the use of specific lexical choices in their writing. For example, as L2 writers in their study write in response to the assignments, they focus their interests on particular topics and use lexical choices related to the topics. While the notion of voice as the writers’ own authorship is hardly identified from this type of positioning, the writers align themselves as a group of people who are interested in the topics being written. Within this context, the notion of voice in L2 writing can be considered to be a social process in which writers write in response to or align themselves to be part of the society. In addition to the lexical choice as representation of ideational positioning, voice in L2 writing is also manifested in the syntactic choices. For example, the use of nominalization, and impersonal ways when referring to people in their writing (Ivanic & Camps, 2001).

Another type of positioning that helps explain how voice is manifested in L2 writing is the use of *interpersonal positioning* (Ivanic & Camps, 2001). Within this context, the writer’s notion of voice as the writer’s authority and certainty is manifested in how writers use particular

tenses and modality. While this is certainly context bound, the use of tense and modality can show whether the writers are fully confident with what they write or not. The writers' confidence is often associated with strong voice for it shows the authority that the writers have in their writing. To show their confidence, for example, writers often use present tense and limit the use of modals that show uncertainty (Ivanic & Camps, 2001). Consequently, the frequent use of modals as markers of certainties (e.g., may and could) are indicative to the weak voice in L2 academic writing.

The other positioning that L2 writers are inclined to do is the use *textual positioning* (Ivanic & Camps, 2001). This positioning, which is indicated by preferences on the use of particular modes of communication is one of the salient features found in L2 writing. In the study by Ivanic and Camps (2001), for example, L2 writers tend to express their ideas in long and complex sentences to associate themselves with academic literacy voice. Other forms of textual positioning are manifested in the preferences of L2 writers to use particular semiotic modes, such as the use of mathematical symbols and different font sizes to put emphasis. While the preferences of using certain modes of communication in writing do not exclusively characterize L2 writing, it could be an indication that L2 writers align themselves to particular ways of writing to create their identities as writers.

### **The challenges that L2 writers face when including voice in their writing**

In line with the different styles that L2 writers use in their writing compared to U.S mainstream people, focusing on analyzing voice in L2 writing has been criticized for the possible biases that researchers may have. Stapleton (2002), for example, argues that how researchers view the struggle that L2 writers experience in writing with voice is misleading because many researchers tend to analyze the notion of voice by detaching it from the contexts. He further argues that the mismatches between the contexts and how their writing is assessed is one of the factors that leads to the misconception that L2 writers write with no voice. For example,

most L2 writers who come to the U.S write in the context of academic writing, yet the assessment of voice is done based on how voice is commonly viewed by people from American mainstream culture who are accustomed to write creatively.

Apart from whether research on the notion of voice in L2 writing is misleading, it is still important for educators (i.e., writing instructors in particular) to get insights about the struggle that L2 writers experience in including the notion of voice in their writing. Since the issue of voice in the U.S mainstream is often related to authorial identity, or authorial presence (Ramanathan, & Kaplan, 1996; Stapleton, 2002), voice is often overlooked as individual accomplishment rather than as social/cultural accomplishment in Sperling and Appleman's (2011) term. This apparently results in the sense of lacking clear voice in L2 academic writing. Additionally, since that notion of voice in writing is also connected to the intended audience (Kirby, et al., 2004; Ramanathan, & Kaplan, 1996), L2 writers often have limited knowledge about the expectation of their intended writing audience. This is especially the case when the writers and their intended writing audience do not share a similar cultural understanding. Ramanathan and Kaplan (1996) argue that "audience and voice are largely culturally constrained notions, relatively inaccessible to students who are not full participants in the culture within which they are asked to write" (p. 22). This implies that the challenges that L2 writers face in writing with clear voice in the U.S mainstream can be due to their unfamiliarity with the audience and the expectation of how a piece of writing should be presented based on the commonality of U.S mainstream expectation. Additionally, the contradiction between how self-representation is manifested in L2 writing and in the U.S mainstream can be one of the contributing factors that make L2 writing lack a sense of voice when analyzed by people from the U.S mainstream culture. For example, self-representation in the U.S mainstream culture is indicated by the use of pronoun "I", whereas, in academic writing, English as a second Language (ESL) writers show their self-representativeness through different types of positionings such as ideational, interpersonal, and textual positionings as indicated in the study by Ivanic and Camps (2001).

While the different ways of representing self in written forms seems to be in line with Stapleton's (2002) critique, the concerns of voice for L2 writers can go beyond the use of pronouns and lexical choices. According to Ramanathan and Kaplan (1996), the different ways that L2 writers organize their thoughts and the differences in cultural values as well as the limited knowledge in their L2 possibly become the obstacles for L2 writers in writing with clear voice. With this in mind, it is not only about the use of pronoun "I" and lexical choices that hinder L2 writers to write with clear voice. A study by Hirvela and Belcher (2001), for example, confirms that the notion of voice among L2 writers is complicated as it also refers to the L2 writers' background knowledge about the concept of voice. From their study, they found that the notion of voice for mature and established L2 writers was problematic as it often conflicts with the existing voice that the writers have in their L1.

From studying three graduate students who returned to the U.S for their doctoral study, Hirvela and Belcher (2001) identify that their difficulties writing with voice in English as part of the requirements in their degree are triggered by their already established position in their home countries. As all of the participants in their study already published articles in their home countries, they had already established voice in their writing. Yet, the different demand and expectation as well as their status in a new country made it difficult for them to align themselves in their L2 writing. For most of them, finding a new voice that suits their needs was more important than just adopting the notion of voice as a representative of true self, given the fact that they already have sense of who they are. Within this context, the difficulties of writing with strong voice as expected in the U.S mainstream culture is also triggered by cultural backgrounds of the writers that are incongruent with the U.S mainstream culture expectation.

Unlike the notion of voice in mature L2 writing, writing with voice for immature L2 writers such as high school and college students can even be more challenging. This is especially the case when the writers come from a culture that is different from the U.S mainstream. Ramanathan and Kaplan (1996) argue that since audience and voice are interconnected, it can be challenging for writers coming from non-mainstream culture to

write with strong voice as they may not be familiar with the culture of the audience. Additionally, the notion of self-representation in non-U.S mainstream cultures may also hinder L2 writers to write with individual voice. For example, within the U.S mainstream, it is generally acceptable to use pronoun “I” to show authorship, but it is not necessarily the case for L2 writers who come from collective societies such as China and Japan. While it is certainly a generalization to argue that all L2 writers from collective societies do not write using pronoun “I”, the insight on how individualism is viewed in such societies explains the challenges that L2 writers who come from those countries face in using “I” in their writing (Matsuda, 2001; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999).

Shen (1989) for example, describes his struggle to write with individual voice in his composition class years ago when he was a student in a U.S university. For him, writing with authorial voice meant renegotiating his identity. Coming from China where collective societies view individualism as a kind of rebellion, Shen (1989) found it hard to write using the pronoun “I”. As the use of pronoun “I” is considered to be subordinate to “we” in his L1, it took time for Shen to adjust to U.S mainstream writing norms where it is preferable to show the concept of “self” in writing. The case of Shen can be used as an example of the challenge that L2 writers experience in writing with authorial voice due to different cultural backgrounds.

Similar to Shen (1989), Matsuda (2001) also recalls his own experience when he was an international undergraduate student in the U.S. He found it challenging to project the notion of self in his writing as being himself in this context did not necessarily match who he was when he was in his Japanese society. For him, finding his own voice was not about discovering the true self; rather it was the process of negotiating his socially and discursively constructed identity with the expectation of the readers of his writing. Within these contexts, it is clear that the concept of voice is connected to the intended audience of his writing. While this was Matsuda’s case, it can also be the challenge that other L2 learners face when writing to a U.S audience in which the expectation is different from their L1 writing audience. Additionally, from his research about Japanese

writing, Matsuda (2001) concludes that Japanese writers do write with voice, yet it is not always transferable to the U.S mainstream contexts. Further, he gives an example that the way Japanese use the first personal pronoun is different from the use of the English first personal pronoun. From his research, Matsuda (2001) concludes that the difficulties that Japanese students encounter in writing with clear voice in English is triggered by the fact that they lack familiarity with discursive options and discourse availability in constructing voice in their writing, rather than the incompatibility of the notion of voice with their cultural orientation toward self and society.

### **The implication for L2 writing instruction in the U.S contexts**

As has been pointed out by many researchers, L2 writers write differently; therefore, it is important for writing teachers to help L2 writers develop the notion of voice in their writing. Additionally, since the problems related to voice in L2 writing are connected to many aspects such as different cultural expectations, contexts, and writing audience as pointed out by several researchers (Matsuda, 2001; Ramanathan & Akitson, 1996; Shen, 1989), L2 writing instruction should then be directed to increase students' awareness about different cultural expectation in terms of who the audience of the writing is, what the purpose of the writing is, and the contexts where written forms are produced. For example, in order to address the differences of how L2 writers from collective societies such as from Japan, China, and other countries associated with collective societies write, writing teachers either in high school or university contexts need to teach students what to expect when the audience include people from the U.S mainstream culture. As has been pointed out by Matsuda (2001), the notion of voice for Japanese writers is manifested in many different ways, and it is not always transferable to English. Educators need to be aware that L2 writers may need adjustment and explicit instruction in order to write with voice in their L2 writing.



While there are certainly no easy strategies to teach L2 writers especially the beginner writers about the cultural expectation in U.S mainstream culture, I find that Kirby and his colleagues (2004) offer some useful teaching strategies to improve students' awareness about the importance of voice in writing. For example, as beginner L2 writers usually struggle with the concepts of audience for their writing, activities related to building awareness about writing for a different audiences, could be used to scaffold instruction about the notion of voice in writing. For instance, before students practice writing with clear voice, I think it is useful for students to practice writing to different intended audiences. This can also be used as a bridge to understand cultural expectations that many L2 writers including myself, find challenging. The discussion about what to expect to write when the intended writing audience is from the U.S mainstream culture, for example, can give L2 writers some insight on how to write to a particular audience. As an L2 learner myself, the concept of audience is easier to understand than the concept of voice in writing. Accordingly, by scaffolding writing instruction with what students already know and moving toward more challenging activities, one can help students to learn within their zone of proximal development in Vygotsky's term (Vygotsky, 1978) and as discussed by Hillocks (1995).

With regard to scaffolding instruction to help L2 learners become aware of the concept of audience, some of the activities that Kirby and his colleagues (2004) offer in their book can be very helpful. The activities related to anticipating audience response, personalizing audience, and audience adaptation are some of the activities that can be used to increase L2 writers' awareness about the audience in writing. Activities related to "anticipating audience response" (Kirby et al., 2004, p. 96), for example, allow beginning writers to predict how their intended audience will respond to their writing. This activity can also be connected to the notion of voice through the Bakhtinian perspective, in which writers respond to previous utterances and anticipate future utterances. With this in mind, writers can carefully select appropriate lexical choices and voice in order to persuade their intended audience. While these activities are not necessarily easy for beginner L2 writers from non-mainstream cultures, such

writing exercises can be used to help them write with strong voice. Similarly, activities related to “personalizing audience,” according to Kirby et al. (2004, p. 97), can help beginning writers to adjust their writing to suit their intended audience’s interests and needs. In a similar vein, activities related to “audience adaptation” (Kirby et al., 2004, p. 99) can also be used to help beginning writers practice writing with clear voice. As different audiences require different writing styles in terms of the degree of formality and word choices, activities related to audience adaptation help writers to adjust themselves to write with different voices.

While the activities related to building students’ awareness about the sense of audience proposed by Kirby et al. (2004) are intended for general writers, in my view, their ideas can be adjusted to suit L2 writers’ needs in relation to writing for the audience. For example, in response to L2 writers’ difficulties to write to the intended audience from the U.S mainstream culture, writing teachers can provide insights about what audiences from mainstream U.S culture expect in a piece of writing. While there are certainly variations in the expectations of audience, the ideas of how to direct students to have awareness about the sense of audience in writing suggested by Kirby et al (2004) can be helpful for writing teachers including L2 writing teachers.

Additionally, since the concept of voice in writing is manifested differently in different types of writing (Hyland, 2002), writing instruction concerning the use of voice should be focused on the expectation of related disciplines where writers have to write in particular discourses and genres (Ramanathan & Akitson, 1996). While this is particularly the case of academic writing, I think increasing L2 writers’ awareness about the expectations of audience in particular contexts is very important in L2 writing instruction. For example, Hyland (2002) suggests, particular disciplines such as arts and humanities have different concepts of voice from other disciplines such as physical science and engineering; therefore, teaching students to write in accordance with the disciplines they are in is more helpful than just focusing on teaching voice as an authorial voice. Helms-Park and Stapleton (2003) purport that “it may be enlightening to uncover the multiple functions of linguistic features, together with their possible

contributions to voice, in a genre-specific manner” (p, 256), indicating that voice in academic related writing may be manifested differently in different writing genres.

Additionally, Stapleton (2002) argues that focusing too much on voice may hinder L2 writers from writing a strong argument and put less concern on the content. Because of this, writing teachers need to consider the unique needs of their students. While ideally, L2 writers are knowledgeable on how to write with voice in various differing contexts, writing teachers ought to consider that it takes time for L2 writers to adjust themselves to the U.S mainstream culture. As indicated by Shen (1989) and Matsuda (2001), opting to write in accordance with the expectation of the U.S mainstream culture involves conflicting ideologies and identities for them. As a result, writing teachers need to take their process of adjustment into consideration when teaching writing to L2 writers.

In response to the problematic notion of voice for different levels of L2 writers (Helms-Park and Stapleton, 2003; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001), it is important that writing instruction related to the notion of voice is adjusted to the need of the students. For example, in the case of mature L2 writers where their problems are centered on developing their already developed sense of voice (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001), the writing instruction for these particular students’ needs is certainly different from novice L2 writers. For mature writers, such as those identified as doctoral students in the study by Hirvela and Belcher (2001), for example, suitable writing instruction could direct them to transfer their writing ability to fit the intended audience of their writing. In contrast, more explicit writing instruction concerning the identification of voice in writing and how to write with strong voice can be very useful for novice L2 writers who are just beginning their undergraduate study (Helm-Park & Stapleton, 2003).

While writing instruction for mature L2 writers can be very specific to their disciplines and future writing, some strategies that Kirby et al. (2004) offer related to teaching voice can also be very useful for immature L2 writers. For example, activities related to “trying on other voice” (Kirby et al., 2004, p. 85) can be used to help students practice writing

with voice. In these activities, students can use their favorite authors' writing styles as models for them to write with voice. Even though copying someone's writing style may not be good for the development of a writer's unique voice, it can help beginning writers to have a sense of voice in writing and how expert writers put their voice into writing. Another activity that I think can be useful to practice writing with voice is "getting into another speaker activity" (Kirby et al, 2004, p. 86). In this activity, students are required to interview someone and write a monologue about his/her personality, and students learn to write with voice in order to capture the person's personality in their writing. Again, while activities offered by Kirby et al. (2004) are not specifically for L2 beginner writers, I think the activities can be modified to suit the need of L2 writers related to improving L2 writers' ability to write with clear voice.

In sum, voice in writing does matter and it is manifested in various ways. While the concept of writing with voice is important for both U.S mainstream writers and L2 writers, the notion of voice is manifested differently in L1 and L2 writing depending on the sociocultural contexts of the intended audience. For example, when writing is intended for the U.S mainstream audience, L2 writers who are not familiar with the U.S mainstream culture possibly have difficulties in meeting the expectations of their writing audience. The reverse situation may also happen. While lacking of voice in L2 writing can be a sign of weakness of L2 writers in their written language, it does not mean that L2 writers write in their L1 with no voice. Many researchers have shown that the problems with the lack of voice in L2 writing are mostly triggered by different cultural expectations and the contexts where L2 writers have to write. Therefore, it can be said that voice in writing is context bound.

In response to the challenges that L2 writers face in writing with voice, there are some implications for writing instruction to improve L2 writers' ability to write with voice. While activities taken from the book by Kirby et al. (2004) can be useful in improving L2 writers' ability to write with voice, the strategies used in teaching writing to L2 writers really depend on the characteristics of the learners and the problems they encounter. Thus, focusing only on particular activities cannot guarantee

the successfulness of writing instruction. As teaching is a reflective practice (Hillocks, 1995), having different approaches for writing instruction is certainly more important than to just follow particular strategies that have been claimed to be useful. In a similar vein, teaching voice to L2 writers should also be reflective and directed to help students improve their writing by applying a variety of possible strategies. Furthermore, since voice is one of the elements of good writing, it should be one of the primary focuses in ESL or English language learning classrooms where the students are expected to write for U.S mainstream audiences.

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