Focusing on authorial voice with an integrated framework for teaching EFL writing

What this research was about and why it is important

One key feature of good academic writing is its authorial voice, which refers to the representation of the writer’s identity in the text, addressing the relationship between the individual writer, the text, and the reader. For many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and teachers, how to write or teach to write with authority is a very big challenge. This study has provided a promising solution to help EFL learners and teachers to understand and address the voice issue by introducing an integrated framework combining two existing approaches, namely the appraisal framework and ‘possibilities for selfhood’. By applying this framework in a year-long investigation of Japanese EFL students’ writer identity development, this study demonstrates that the framework could be useful for teachers to better understand how students construct their identities, so that they might provide more effective teaching of EFL writing.

What the researcher did

• An integrated framework that shows how appraisal (ATTITUDE – judgement, emotion, etc., ENGAGEMENT – acknowledgments of other perspectives, and GRADUATION – emphasis or deemphasis) provides a system of evaluative meanings for recognising writerly selves (autobiographical, authorial, and discoursal), was used to analyze student writing to understand students’ sense of authority and subjectivity more explicitly.
• A table is provided showing resources for constructing writer identities according to the integrated framework.
• 16 EFL university students in Japan taking a year-long English composition course participated in monthly interviews and provided writing (argumentative essays) for analysis. In this article, one case was analysed (pseudonym: ‘Aya’).

What the researcher found

• The interviews revealed that
  ○ Aya’s overly-personal involvement in her essay failed to meet her teacher’s expectations requiring her to ‘be critical’ and objective
  ○ she misinterpreted being critical as having personal ideas
• Text analysis revealed that
  ○ she tried to maintain neutrality in her essay, using only one emotional phrase, but used too many judgment phrases, creating an overall imbalance
  ○ Aya attributed her arguments to numerous sources, trying to blend her voice with others, but failed as these were not appropriately integrated, relying too much on awkwardly presented direct quotes
  ○ she used consistent language to value the social impact of her argument with phrases such as even, not even, just, only, strongly, just because, and did not link these with the voices from other sources

Things to consider

• This study showed that students might better meet teachers’ expectations if there is a pedagogical focus on the writer’s voice or identity, fostering understanding about the impact of certain word and phrase choices.
• If teachers use this framework to conduct such an analysis, they might effectively help students to develop a balanced authorial voice by providing more explicit instruction and formative feedback.
• In future research, longer texts may be needed to further show the utility of the integrated framework.


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