

The role of authorial voice in teaching second language writing to Chinese students

What this study was about and why it is important

Many studies have showed the importance of authorial voice in second language (L2) writing, yet few have focused on how the voice can be directly used to teach L2 writing in classrooms. To fill this gap, the researcher combined qualitative and quantitative methods to study whether voice is a useful tool to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing to Chinese students enrolled in a thirteen-week college EFL writing course in mainland China. The study found five factors (three positive ones and two negative) in voice shaping, two of which could particularly facilitate language use, idea building, and structuring in EFL writing.

What the researcher did

- The participants were forty-five Chinese MTI (Master of Translation and Interpreting) students enrolled in the course. The study was divided into two sessions: S1 (week 1-5, before voice teaching) and S2 (week 6-11, voice teaching).
- The quantitative part of the study occurred at the end of S1: A portfolio of all essays by a student during S1 was compiled and two experienced teachers were invited to rate voice salience of these portfolios. In addition, all participants completed a Likert-scale survey. A statistical model was used to analyse the results.
- In the voice teaching sessions, basic concepts of four important voice theories were introduced and taught.
- The qualitative part of the study occurred at week thirteen. Forty-five students were required to finish a questionnaire based on the quantitative findings, and five students were involved in an interview. In addition, the researcher conducted two-round checks on the essay data (495 pieces and 145,905 words in total), first on all essays per week and second on all essays by a same student throughout the course.

What the researcher found

- Three factors (*genre knowledge*, *stakeholders' expectation*, and *awareness of reflection*) were positive to voice shaping while two (*socially-enabled positions* and *individual knowledge about discourse community*) were negative.
- Both *awareness of reflection* and *genre knowledge* facilitated language use, idea building, and structuring of EFL writing.

Things to consider

- Five statistically meaningful factors for voice shaping are important to curriculum design for L2 writing.
- Further study and pedagogy should value students' *genre knowledge* and *awareness of reflection* when teaching L2 writing.

Material, data, open access article: N/A

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