

“Blessed in my own way:” Pedagogical affordances for dialogical voice construction in multilingual student writing

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Abstract

While the theoretical orientation of voice as an amalgamated dialogical effect has received consensus in second language writing circles, classroom practice and research have not kept pace with these developments. This article reports the trajectory of a Japanese student in negotiating the classroom affordances provided by a dialogical pedagogy to construct her desired voice. Analysis of the ways this pedagogy facilitated awareness in the student and progressive understanding in the teacher suggests implications for a pedagogy of voice. The study unveils the components that are amalgamated, process of dialogicality, and the challenges in achieving a co-constructed voice.

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Introduction

Though voice is a young field of scholarship in multilingual writing, second language scholars have gained from poststructuralist theories to formulate a complex perspective. As recent publications on the state of the art show (Sancho Guinda & Hyland, 2012; Tardy, 2012a, *in press*), orientations to voice as *amalgamated* of diverse textual and extra-textual resources (Matsuda, 2001), *dialogical* of the personal and the social (Prior, 2001), and achieved as an *effect* by readers (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007) have gained acceptance in the field. The provenance of these metaphors is obvious. That identities are multiple (Peirce, 1995), multimodal (Gee, 1990), negotiated (Bakhtin, 1981), and constructed (Goffman, 1981) has been widely discussed in poststructuralist circles in diverse disciplines for some time. However, such theoretical discourse among multilingual writing scholars has not been matched by effective pedagogical applications or empirical research. Tardy (*in press*) points to the irony “that many studies on identity and voice that are influential in second language writing actually examine L1 writers and/or texts rather than L2 writers” (p. 18). Therefore, she has called for more research on how multilingual writers draw from diverse cultural and linguistic resources, especially in classroom contexts, for voice. Such a research agenda will provide more complexity to ongoing definitions of voice, informed by actual experiences of teachers and students.

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Pedagogical practice is marked by other inconsistencies. Jeffery's (2011) interview of secondary school teachers reveals that a majority of them still hold an expressivist orientation to voice despite the theoretical dominance of social and dialogical models. Matsuda and Jeffery's (2012) textual study of assessment rubrics (in tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, and SAT) shows that voice is inadequately operationalized, even though statements of writing outcomes (such as those of Writing Program Administrators) increasingly make a place for voice. Outside the United States, we find a similar inconsistency. Through interviews with master's degree students in Central Europe, Petrić (2010) found that the most frequent conceptions of voice were individualistic, based on expression of opinion, authorial presence, and personal experience. This theory/practice disconnect is partly attributable to the fact that teachers have not benefited from research in multilingual pedagogical contexts to inform their practice. The existing studies on voice focus on its textual features (Hyland, 2012; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Tardy, 2012b). Others focus on the broader construct of identity in L2 contexts outside composition (Harklau, 2000; Peirce, 1995; Starfield, 2002). While some of the textual studies focus on reader perceptions, Tardy (2012b) argues for the need to move beyond texts and readers to the full writing ecology in which voice is negotiated.

In charting such a course for voice studies in multilingual contexts, Tardy (in press) makes a special case for classroom ecology. Observing that “surprisingly few studies of voice are situated in classrooms” (p. 17), Tardy calls for practitioner research. She argues, “Future research that examines how instructors construct voice through the writing of their own students could help broaden an understanding of the influences on voice construction when there is an existing relationship between the reader and writer. In addition, classroom-based studies of voice may help to shed more light on pedagogical techniques that aid students in developing control over their written identities” (p. 17). In this article, I describe how a dialogical pedagogy I adopted, with an ecological orientation to the learning environment, helped my students construct their voices. Focusing on the trajectory of a Japanese student, whom I call Kyoko, I explicate the types of negotiations and affordances that helped her develop her voice. Integral to her voice construction was my own influences and negotiations as a teacher in facilitating relevant affordances. In focusing on this classroom co-construction of voice, I hope to clarify the complex negotiations that teachers have to take into consideration in designing their pedagogies for multilingual writing. Before I discuss my pedagogy and research method, I outline how I operationalized the dominant theoretical constructs for my classroom purposes.

Uncovering dialogical voice

Teachers influenced by the notion of voice as an amalgamated dialogical effect will be left with the following practical questions as they design their course:

1. What are the components amalgamated in voice?
2. What is the nature of the negotiations that characterize dialogical voice?
3. How do interlocutors (i.e., teachers, peers) mitigate their appropriation of writers' voices in the achievement of “effect”?

Though Matsuda's (2001) treatment of voice as amalgamated reveals how discursual and non-discursual (i.e., citations) features contribute to voice, there are diverse other components that other researchers have identified. Kramsch and Lam (1999) identify personal identity and social identity as separate from textual identity (which corresponds to voice). Ivanič (1998) has classified the diverse textual identities of a writer that require amalgamation: i.e., the autobiographical self, discursual self, self as author, and possibilities for self-hood. However, Tardy (2012b) further points out that while textual components of voice have been discussed well, extra-textual components have not been studied: “While scholarship has drawn attention to the ways in which voice (as self-representation) is constructed through text, we still know little about how aspects of a writer's identity beyond the text (e.g., sex, age, and race) may influence voice construction” (p. 65).

In this article, I adopt a heuristic featuring *identity*, *role*, *subjectivity*, and *awareness* to explore how such “identity[ies] beyond the text” find amalgamation in the textual voices of multilingual students.¹ Though there are

¹ I develop this heuristic from a model constituting identity, role, and awareness in the theorization of voice by Kramsch (2000). I added subjectivity to address ideological considerations in voice. For a detailed discussion, see Canagarajah (2002), pp. 105–110.

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