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Book Review

Authorial Presence in English Academic Texts: A Comparative Study of Student Writing across Cultures and Disciplines. Iga Maria Lehman (2018), Peter Lang, ISBN 978-3-631-74940-1

Edwin Appah Dartey^{1a}

1. Introduction

In a quest to improve their writing proficiency, second language (L2) learners are often advised by English language teachers to establish a voice in academic writing. The need for writers to establish a voice in academic writing is a long-standing idea that is backed by the assertion that a strong voice indicates advanced writing proficiency. This idea has necessitated several studies on the role of voice in L2 writing. Sperling and Appleman (2011) reveal that the existent literature on voice research broadly defines this

concept as referring to “authors, writing styles, authorship, language registers, rhetorical stance, written and spoken prosody, the self in the text, and scores of others” (p. 70). They however find this broad definition to be problematic and emphasize the need for a voice to be clearly defined. Therefore, *Authorial Presence in English Academic Texts* aims to fill the gap by defining the concept of authorial voice and how it is realized among L2 learners across different cultural and disciplinary backgrounds.

¹ MA, Email: darteyedwin2@gmail.com

Tel: +1-443-2518500

^a Ohio University, USA

The choice of learners from different cultures can be linked to the available literature, which points to the need for studies on authorial voice across cultures of L2 writers. Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) postulate that the available principles of developing an authorial voice are heavily loaded with the western ideology of individualism, and this seems to be problematic for L2 writers, especially those from collectivistic cultures. Therefore, a study of student writing by writers from different cultures such as this study is possibly a solution to this problem. Iga Maria Lehman's book is the twelfth in Peter Lang's series on *Language, Culture, and Society*. The target readership of this monograph is applied linguists, English language practitioners at tertiary levels, and students who are interested in the role of a writer's voice in academic writing with extensions to cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. The book consists of four chapters, and these chapters coherently build up the idea of how identity negotiation is essential to the L2 writing process. A special highlight of this book is the development of a comparative framework called the Primary and Multiple Scoring Test (MTS), which was created to assess voice (authorial identity) in the discourse of students from varied cultures and disciplines.

2. Chapter One- Language, Culture, and Identity

This chapter and to a large extent the first three chapters of this book deal with a general explanation of concepts, theories, and models that are relevant to understanding authorial identity as an interdisciplinary phenomenon. The goal of this chapter is to explore the language/culture interface and its implication for L2 identity construction. The first part of this exploration establishes the relationship between language, society, and culture, with a focus on the influence of culture on writer identity. This relationship gives readers a general review of the macro parameters existent in the remaining sections of the book. Lehman defines authorial identity as "a dynamic concept which is not entirely socially determined but can be challenged, negotiated, and changed by an individual's agency" (p. 51). The author further argues that the Whorfian hypothesis of seeing language and culture as inseparable with complete extensions to an individual is problematic because writers have

the agentive power to challenge the discourse and cultural practices of their communities. The chapter then proposes an integrative view of L2 writer identity with the consideration of writing as a social practice and as an individual phenomenon. This unit proceeds by explaining the relations between text, discourse, and genre and the role they play in the process of L2 writing. The chapter ends with quotations from Anna Wierzbicka and Eva Hoffman, two renowned Polish bilingual writers, who narrate how they reconstructed their identities when they were learning English as a second language. Their writing cited in this chapter reveals that L2 writers are aware of the differences between their first and second languages, and this gives L2 writers a good sense of cross-cultural awareness as they learn to express different languages. These consolidated cultural facets also result in the negotiation and creation of new identities and enforce a writer's linguistic diversity through past and present lenses.

3. Chapter Two- Written Communication in a Context-Sensitive Perspective

This chapter seeks to explain the emergence of writing as a medium of communication and the institutional contexts of written communication as a meaning-making system with a special focus on the role of metadiscourse markers. Metadiscourse markers are social engagement tools writers choose to help mediate interactions with a reader. Examples of these markers include transitions (e.g., *in addition to and but*), frame markers (e.g., *to conclude and my purpose is*), code glosses (e.g., *namely and in other words*), hedges (e.g., *might and perhaps*), and boosters (e.g., *in fact, and definitely*). In explaining the emergence of writing as a medium of communication, the author concurs with the primacy of orality in language communication but justifies the equivalence of writing to orality because of its visualizing effect and relative longevity in terms of language documentation. Lehman further recounts the impact of writing on cultural and intellectual development since the Platonic periods, and argues that human consciousness has been transformed from an orally based thought to a literate thought. In delving deeper into this literate mindset, the written organizational pattern of English is introduced with its linear and writer responsible

nature explained. This written English pattern is contrasted with impersonal and reader responsible language styles such as Polish. The chapter proceeds by situating writing as a semiotic meaning-making tool where textual manifestations are constrained by socio-cultural and institutional choices in which writers find themselves. The goal of this chapter is also achieved as Lehman suggests that metadiscourse markers are appropriate tools that indicate authorial voice. These markers show how writers view writing as a conversation with an audience in mind. Hence, writing is a social practice from this perspective. And by employing metadiscourse markers specifically interactional metadiscourse markers, writers reveal their personalities and social consciousness through constructed texts. Finally, the chapter concludes by creating a relationship between metadiscourse and rhetoric, genres, cultures, and cross-disciplinary variations.

4. Chapter Three- The Construction of Authorial Voice in Student Writing in English as a Second Language

The focus of this chapter is on the relationship between socio-cultural and institutional contexts and the academic writer. The chapter challenges the essentialist approach to language learning which views learners as transparent users devoid of socially influenced elements. Lehman proposes that L2 users align themselves with the rhetorical standards of English in a unique way that varies across cultures. The chapter continues by reviewing relevant research on the global spread of English as a lingua franca (ELF). In this review, the author indicates that the dominant factors in ELF research have evolved from linguistic and cognitive factors to embrace socially and culturally sensitive factors in which the needs of individual language users are prioritized. Considering these culturally sensitive factors, L2 learners are said to formulate linguistic structures in connection with the environment they find themselves, and Prior (2001) underlies the utmost importance of these environments in an ELF model. In other parts of the chapter, the chapter's goal is further explained with the need for genre-based writing instruction. Lehman explains that Genre approaches move beyond the rhetorical structure and lexicogrammatical aspects of a text. And this movement makes it possible to

identify social restrictions imposed on language use. As these restrictions are imposed, they enforce the idea of writing as a social practice influenced by cultural and institutional factors. The chapter ends with a review of the third space theory. This theory views multilingual writers as unique people who develop an individualized and hybridized identity that is not necessarily adherent to first language(L1) or second language writing norms. The need for a hybridized and unique identity is further strengthened as Lehman advocates for a shift from traditional dichotomies of a native speaker and a non-native speaker to a position that accepts multiple voices and unique identities of L2 writers.

5. Chapter Four- The Inquiry: A Study of Authorial Presence in English Academic Texts across Cultures and Disciplines

The last chapter presents an empirical study on the voice in academic texts across cultures and disciplines. The general motive of this study is to investigate how overall writing quality correlates with authorial voice. The study begins with a description of its theoretical and methodological framework and a review of relevant literature. In this description, the author asserts that the construct of voice developed in this study has not been tackled in voice research. An underpinning element in this chapter is the hypothesis of the study which indicates that academic writer identity is not fixed but it is influenced procedurally by overall writing competence and the three aspects of a writer's self. That is the individual (I), collective(C), and depersonalized (D) self. Other features of this empirical study are the corpora which consist of pre-writing questionnaires, biographical interviews, and an in-class writing prompt, and a population of 310 students from 30 countries and 4 sub-disciplines (English, Management, Economics and Finance, and Accounting). The chapter progresses by dealing with a research procedure which consists of rater analysis with two raters rating each script. In rating the scripts, raters graded students' essays based on writing competence on a five-level scale (Appendix B), and dominant voice on a three-dimensional analytic rubric (Appendix C). Specifically, the five-level scale is the Primary and Multiple scoring test, and this scale is partitioned into

sections of rhetorical structure, focus and development, and language use. The other grading criteria, the analytic rubric also outlines the categorizations of discursive resources including pronouns and passives that signal the three types of voice (Appendix C). Other aspects of the research procedure include a data analysis consisting of 13 detailed quantitative hypotheses, qualitative analysis, findings, and a conclusion. The finding of the study reveals that the dominant voice employed by student-writers in the study is the depersonalized voice (D). This is shown through discursive resources employed in their writing, and information from questionnaires and biographical interviews. In some of the interviews, writers reveal that the reason why they hide their authorial identity using a *D voice* is to appear formal and acceptable in their academic communities. This finding confirms the argument of theories reviewed in the first three chapters. The arguments indicate that authorial identities of L2 writers are constrained by social and institutional factors in academic writing.

6. Concluding Remarks

The significance of this monograph lies in the novel nature of its empirical study. Lehman tests her model with three hundred and ten students from thirty countries and four sub-disciplines. With a few large-scale empirical studies on authorial voice research, this feature makes this book distinct in authorial voice research. These views are substantiated by Zhao and Llosa (2008) who indicate a lack of empirical studies that explore the nature and characteristics of the relationship between voice and overall writing quality. Therefore, the large sample size of this study and the MTS comparative framework can be considered as two vital strengths of the book. Another significance of this comparative study is its cross-cultural nature. According to Zhao and Llosa (2008), knowledge about the cultural and institutional dynamics of L2 writers may better inform L2 writing pedagogy. Therefore, a comparative study of voice among L2 student-writers from thirty countries and cultures fills this gap of voice research by offering readers insights into how L2 writers employ discursive resources that reveal a depersonalized voice. These insights are classically summarized in the words of an interviewee who said, “English Language has so many restrictions in writing

because you have to follow a certain structure, you shouldn't write about something else or even your own thoughts” (p. 183). A large proportion of interviewed student-writers expressed similar sentiments of being socially restricted in writing. And these findings of identity loss can help L2 writing instructors and curriculum planners to structure lessons that would help writers negotiate their own unique identities in the L2 writing process. Even though this book is beautifully written, it is not without minor challenges. For readers, most parts of the monograph concentrated on an overly extensive review of theories which were sometimes wordy and lengthy, and the final chapter which is the original study was superficially tackled. Specifically, one-fourth of the monograph concentrated on literature reviews, and the findings and conclusion sections were tackled in a few pages. This challenge could have been resolved if the author had explained her findings with more extracts from the relatively large data gathered. For example, in the qualitative analysis section, notes on assumed, imposed, and negotiable identities could have been further explained with more data extracts from not only the interviews but also writing samples and biographies. This empirical information would have further solidified the findings of the study. Another shortcoming identified was a missing section that reports the limitations of the study. Limitations from the application of a novel MTS framework and large-scale data had the potential of informing future research in the authorial voice of precautions to look out for when conducting large-scale research in this area. In addressing this challenge, the author could have discussed the study's limitations while discussing the conclusion and implications sections. Despite these limitations, *Authorial Presence in English Academic texts* is an invaluable book that gives readers insights into authorial identity, and how it is developed in the L2 writing process. These insights are evidenced in the information on how writers prefer depersonalized voice due to institutional and social demands. Therefore, I recommend this book as it makes contributions to the fields of L2 writing instruction and intercultural academic communication studies by drawing readers' attention to the power of cultural and institutional contexts in influencing the identity of L2 writers.

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