# EXAMINING AUTHORIAL VOICE IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' THESIS WRITING

[1] Dindy Aruni Dhifany Zein, [2]Hendriwanto
hendriwanto46@gmail.com
Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati

**ABSTRACT.**
This study aims to determine whether or not the students of the said university already have authorial presences. The paper used a qualitative case study, which source of data came from theses collection that were kept within the university, ranging from 2016 up to 2020. The data was analyzed descriptive qualitatively. This study was conducted in a private University in Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia. There were ten theses papers that were involved within the study. The result of the study showed that the university students do indeed already have an authorial presence. Research finding shows that although some of them might have indicated the existence of authorial presence within their writing, it did not come off as strong. It can be concluded that university students have already found their own voices, although they have found some barrier along the way as well.

**Keywords***: Voice, Authorial voice, Identity, Voice, Agency, Undergraduate Students*

**Introduction**

In the context of higher education, writing has been regarded as the pivotal skills to be mastered by university students. Additionally, writing is deemed as a myriad of cognitive and motivational engagement relying on problems solving skill and developing strategies enabling students to communicate in good manner (Graham, 2010; Kurt & Atay, 2007; McLeod, 1987). Writing is an essential skill that needs to be taught whether the students like it or not. For it comes in really handy whenever the students are facing complex assignment that needs to provide a media to convey their thoughts to a larger audiences, more specifically academic writing. However, not all essay writings can be considered as academic writing or does it make one an expert or researcher. Before we delve into its importance, it is crucial for the students to understand what academic writing is in general. Academic writing serves as a media to interact with readers in certain field by rendering their knowledge into a written form.

One does not always have to summarize what they have gathered, but it is crucial for someone to also add their thoughts into it hence the term academic writing. One also needs to provide evidence relevant to the writing, hence why not just any essay can be considered as academic writing. This particular skill is important to be learned because it can help to enhance students' understanding. It has a formal tone and style, but not necessarily as formal as some people might make it to be.

It also helps the development of students' analytical thinking, for one has to take and information, pouring their own thoughts on it before conveying it into a written form for a larger audience to proceed. It needs to make sense as well. Academic writing also enhances students' objectivity, since they are allowed to write the idea in a way that can convey their understanding. The skill will stay with the students for the rest of their lives. Not only that, it can also help to improve their professionalism and research skills. Practicing academic writing in earlier stage can help one to understand the easiest way to obtain a data. The presence of the author is to be expected of a high quality standard writing (Llosa, Beck, & Zhao, 2011). In second language (L2) writing, however, the people involved in educational world have this tendency to not take it as seriously therefore easily exclude it from constructional context of writing. In regards to address the bare minimum attention toward the topic voice, researches have stated a few reasons, such as how authors have to develop their lexical skills to be able to showcase their voice in their works (Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003), 2003, p. 198). Voice in academic writing, however, often has to face a few difficulties, one of them being how limited the author is in term of conveying their thoughts into a written form because of conflicting definitions of words used in their source language and target language. This issue does not exclude the world of thesis writing, too. This issue seem to be regarded lightly as academics tend to address for a far more interesting issue. Taking these phenomenon into consideration, the author decides to conduct a research on authorial voice in undergraduate students' thesis writing. Thus, how does authorial voice affect undergraduate students' thesis writing remains to questionable.

**Identity in students writing**

In a normal setting, one has to do all the interactions directly, by talking or communicating what they have in mind. However, academic community is unlike any other. Written form is the only form acceptable and being regarded as a form of interaction. According to Kuhi, Rahimivand (2014), writing is what academics tend to love to do the most, as a way to contribute their thoughts for the betterment of science or a greater meaning. This interaction alone helps to shape the 'identity' of the said academics. Additionally, Kuhi, Rahimivand (2014) also stated that identity represents a sense of self worth, which helps a author to write with authority where they can establish their presence in the paper. It can be affected by the opinions and beliefs of the authors themselves. This definiton is followed by Ivanic (1998)'s statement, in which it can simply relate to build students' will to make claims or to voice out their personal opinion, with external evidences supporting the said opinion. According to Cotterall (2015), the development of scholarly identity is crucial to doctoral journey. Meanwhile, Magalhãesa, Cotterall, Miderosc (2018), pointed out that identity is a sense of belonging to a certain scientific or scholar community. The development of novice authors' increasing confidence as they contribute to their surrounding by submitting their work in order to gain mutual feedback can also be called as identity. When writing papers, one does not only presenting their ideas into a form of written words, but they also have to be creative with the use of the words, (Kuhi, Rahimivand, 2014). Especially in a higher education, where some people prefer certain styles and practices, that can be identified as their 'identity'. (Casanave, 2002; Fox, 1994).

The gradual improvement of academic character is integral to the doctoral journey (Cotterall, 2015). Insightful personality, is related with the sentiment of having a place with a network of analysts and researchers; its improvement can be found in PhD competitors' expanding certainty as they add to discussions inside the scholastic network. Kamler and Thompson (2006) contend that writing in doctoral examination includes the "shared development of text and character." Kamler and

Thompson (2006) as beginner researchers present their work to more experienced friends, dubious of achievement. Doctoral applicants build up their composed way of life as researchers by delivering and getting criticism on abstracts, meeting papers, diary articles and inevitably, their proposition or thesis.

**Voice in academic writing**

It is hard to characterize voice plainly because of its subtle nature and changing ideas after some time (see Matsuda, 2015; for a audit). Early meanings of voice stressed peculiar and expressive highlights recorded as a hard copy (Elbow, 1981; Stewart, 1992); consequently, great writing was relied upon to communicate "the basic singularity of a specific author" (Stewart, 1992). Afterward ideas of voice would in general spot more accentuation on the job of social and social conditions in voice development (Ede, 1992; Prior, 2001). These different highlights of story are the elements of authorial voice. The accomplishment of a solid authorial voice requires noteworthy effort with language, permitting the creator to utilize it in an innovative and reminiscent way. Past that, authorial voice requires huge mental modernity. The author must have the option to alter their composition to suit the current crowd and to introduce an unmistakable, convincing point of view on occasions with which the crowd may have little nature. The individual must be able to express their ideas in the targeted language while as yet including the realities the crowd needs to understand what occurred. The entirety of this requires significant metacognitive expertise (Gombert, 1992). In such socially arranged points of view, authors were considered to have numerous voices to fit unique logical circumstances (Yancey, 1994), and concentrating on the author reader connection with the content as a medium, much subjective exploration investigated scholars' appearance of authorial character and voice (e.g., Hirvela and Belcher, 2001; Ivanic' and Camps, 2001; Matsuda and Tardy, 2007, among others), which prompted a restricted regard for the job of the amount of literary voice components in voice development.

As of late, Hyland (2008) proposed a text-oriented concept of authorial voice. In which his focus was the interactional part of academic writing, as stated by Hyland

(2008) "every successful academic text displays the author's awareness of both its readers and its consequences" (p. 6), implying proper interactions with readers as one of an author's main objectives. Hence, he defined voice as an use of one's language to build a relationship between people to people, and people to ideas. Hyland's voice model was constructed of stance and engagement. Stance focuses on an author's interactional activities, which may help the authors in expressing their opinions and sentiments on the topic related. It is divided into a  few categories, that involve "hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions". Hedges are linguistic indicators that imply the authors' uncertainty on something (e.g., could, may, more or less, probably, tend to) (Hyland, 1998). On the other hand, boosters are linguistics indicators help the authors to show their confidence in something, hence limiting the opposing opinion (e.g., definitely, extremely, indeed, very) (Hyland, 2005). Attitude marker, on the other hand, expresses authors' personal emotions on something (e.g., annoying, awfully, honestly, inferior). The last but not least, self-mention, in which the author openly uses first point person pronoun. (Hyland, 2001).

**Agency in academic writing**

Agency assumes a crucial job in the general doctoral direction and in doctoral composition. Etymological anthropologist Laura Ahearn's broadly referred to that "[a]gency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" Ahearn (2001). Inside sociocultural hypothesis the specialist is seen as a significantly social being whose "independence lays on, and is gotten from, social connections, socially composed exercises, and utilization of ancient rarities" (Lantolf, 2013, p. 19). Investigating doctoral community through a sociocultural focal point urges us to see doctoral up-and-comers as submerged in complex social structures that can possibly bear the cost of or potentially compel opportunities for their improvement as scientists. Agency is involved in the doctoral creative cycle through the choices competitors make about their writings as they endeavor to embed their voices into the discussions of their disciplinary networks. Settling on choices about which hypothetical structures to reference, which authors to refer to and how to outline the

contention all interest organization with respect to the author. In settling on these choices, doctoral authors may counsel (among others) their administrators, other disciplinary writings or more experienced researchers (face to face or by perusing their work). Subsequently, the exceptionally social nature of doctoral composition and the centrality of dynamic in delivering text join to make organization basic. Making an interpretation of thoughts into text might be seen as a struggle especially for EAL scholars who must settle on choices both on the substance of their contention and on the best way to communicate their thoughts soundly and properly in their L2. More refined EAL authors may encounter critical self-question due to their affectability to the impression made by various word decisions or stating. In attempting to comprehend the composing related encounters of EAL doctoral up-and-comers, we accordingly need to lead a more extensive examination than just to investigate their writings or the criticism they get. Doctoral up-and-comers' composing related office is impacted by the numerous connections, assets, practices and encounters accessible to them. These components may affect either decidedly or contrarily on competitors. One late examination archives the positive pretended by divisions in interceding STEM competitors' encounters (O'Meara et al., 2014); another distinguished restricting departmental practices which brought about inability to make a feeling of network (Cotterall, 2014). Besides, when doctoral specialists collaborate with their surroundings, their admittance to circumstances is upheld or compelled by, in addition to other things, the social and social capital they bring (Bourdieu, 1986; Walker and Yoon, 2017).

**Methods**

In this cases study, the researcher designed this research to investigate authorial voice in undergraduate students' thesis writing. For the purposes of this investigation, information assortment was twofold: investigating configuration highlights of undergraduate students' thesis writing and contextualizing the authors' voice development in those plans. My hypothetical focal point accept, number one,

that undergraduate scholars essentially draw on discoursal resources to distinguish themselves as legitimate authors; and, number two, that the manners by which the authors position themselves in the talk are reflected in the development of their voices.

In this part, the author present the result of the research. The author analyzes the data based on this sole research question. The first research question is about 1) How does authorial voice affect undergraduate students' thesis writing. The data was collected through some digging through theses collection, as much as ten theses was involved within this research. The study involved to find out about the results. The data collection was taken from Faculty of Teaching and Educational Science's library in a private University in Cirebon.

**TABLE 4.1**

| No | Title |
|----|-------|
| 1. | The Implementation of Concept Mapping Strategy in Teaching Descriptive Writing to the Seventh Grade Students of SMP N 1 Dukupuntang |
| 2. | The Use of Contextual Teaching and Learning in Teaching Speaking at the Second Grade Students of Junior High School |
| 3. | Teaching Speaking through Role Play at the Eighth Grade of Junior High School |
| 4. | The Use of Manga for Teaching Reading at the Eighth Grade of Junior High School |
| 5. | An Analysis of Students' Mistakes in Classifying Word Class Based on Syntax Position |
| 6. | Students' Perception on *Marquee Text* Towards Speed Reading |
| 7. | The Implementation of Problem Based Learning in Teaching Speaking to Tenth Grade Students of SMK Muhammadiyah Kota Cirebon |
| 8. | An Analysis of English-Indonesian Translation Procedures on the Tweet Made by the Students in Senior High School |
| 9. | The Use of Project Based Learning in Teaching Writing Recount Text At The 8th Grade Students of SMP NU Kaplongan |
| 10. | EFL Students' Participation in Online Discussion |

**Findings**

Voice in students' thesis writing

It is rather difficult to track down author's voice, due to its elusive nature and varying ideas that hover upon the said topic. Early definitions of voice as stated by Elbow (1981), and Stewart (1992), implied that voice's nature is to have expressive features on them, and furthermore addressing how high quality writing is expected to have "the essential individuality of a particular author". Written below are the data found by the author.

> Based on the preliminary research, some students in the Seventh Grade of Junior High School have some problems in learning English especially in writing. It is found some problems in students' writing. The students do not like writing, because writing take a long time and make the students bored.
>
> *(Student's Thesis, 2017).*

> After some informal observation to several junior high school and ask the English teacher about the problem when teaching speaking in the classroom, the author found that in SMP Negeri 3 Majalengka, there are many problem when teaching speaking.
>
> *(Student's Thesis, 2017).*

Although the authors are highly proficient English users, they acknowledge that sometimes their L1 interferes with their L2. The author seem to write in a shorter sentences than the author did in their native language. Most of times using the basic "S + V + O" patterns. Take the first author's sentence as an example, they stated that, the students "do not like writing", and the second's author "ask the English teacher about the problem". Resulting a rather monotone sentence. But as it went on, the author had written in a longer sentence, although it sounded somewhat long and awkward, for the authors are limited in term of vocabulary.

> The speaking skill happens to be very vital in language learning. Not only have to know the knowledge, but students also must practice more in order to get fluent. Ur (2009:120) stated that speaking skill is the most vital and complex ability rather than other abilities such as listening, reading, and writing.
>
> *(Student's Thesis, 2018).*

> The reason why the student need to learn reading in English is hopefully that they will have an ability to use it to get in touch with the information all over

the world. Because of that reading is important, students can get much information and knowledge in reading.

*(Student's Thesis, 2016).*

As it is the case with the previous data, although the sentence might be longer, it still sounded awkward for its vocabulary use and constant repetition of the same words, or the author's consistency in elaborating the idea through a much simpler form. Take the first author's "Not only have to know the knowledge", the sentence alone is awkward, although they did deliver the message across, but one can easily mistaken it as something else entirely new. On the contrary, the second author, however, used hedges in their sentence. Stating that "hopefully", the students will have the ability to use English to connect with the world, indicating their uncertainty.

Students' mistakes is something natural, something that the teacher may identify, treat, or ignore. A mistake is not an issue of knowledge, but it is an issue of its application (Corder, 1991). Students do mistakes and errors may be caused because of ignorance and the inability of students to apply what they have learned.

*(Student's Thesis, 2018).*

Speed reading is one of the parts in reading and also is a skill to be learned by everyone. But until now, a lot of people who don't know the technique of speed reading. Speed reading is reading technique. Reading speed is one of the activities and apply in junior high school because reading speed is necessary.

*(Student's Thesis, 2017).*

In spite of the fact that the procedure of composing shorter sentences in English has worked for the authors, they still now and then get input which flags off awkward sentences. Another difficulty that shows obstruction between their L1s and English is the thing that they see as a subjective utilization of prepositional words in English. Likewise, abused prepositional words are regularly featured in their entries. Both these highlights can stamp the authors as composing 'with an emphasize' (Zawacki et al., 2007) in English. Here are some of the works that featured awkward sentences and strange use of prepositional words, as quoted "Students do mistakes and errors may be caused because of ignorance", and "a lot of people who don't know the technique of speed reading".

Moreover, nonlinguistic elements such as gesture, body language, and expressions are needed in conveying message directly without any accompanying speech (p. 204). It means that the learners have to use the

language in order to make their speaking well. *Speaking is the important* element in language because we can build the effective communication by it.
*(Student's Thesis, 2016).*

Every aspect in people's life especially in communication aspect give affects in globalization era. As a result, communication *have becomes* an essential element in globalization and language plays a vital role in communication.
*(Student's Thesis, 2017).*

As written previously, the first author is implying how speaking skill is the most important element there is, in order to build an effective communication with students. Although subtle, the author did use booster to strengthen their opinion. They might not use the words commonly associated as boosters, but the sentence alone limited readers' opposing opinion regarding the sentiment. Apparently, the second author shared the same trait, just on different matter. The writer deliberately argued that, "communication *have becomes* an essential element in globalization and language plays a vital role in communication", openly using boosters to boost up their confidence.

Exercising Agency

An agency is a word that is often used, including in literary world as well. It is often simply shown by author's capability of making decision throughout the entire thesis writing journey, or can be as simple as a message the author's trying to convey. See the data below for reference.

Based on the explanation above, the author found that concept mapping is interested to their self-confidence in writing. The author thinks that concept mapping help the teacher effectively teach writing.
*(Student's Thesis, 2017).*

In Indonesia, the government try to improve English education in school because nowadays English education plays an important role in global's society life. English has been publicly acknowledged as an international language which resides in various fields of the industry whether it is in politics, economics, or art and culture. Without mastering English language communicating with people throughout the world will be limited. That is why English education is important.
*(Student's Thesis, 2017).*

From this data, the author found that the author of this work was trying to convey his opinion throughout their writing. Some of the data found might have similarities in the writing, hence, the author of these papers are only using two out of ten to represent the idea.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The finding reveals that the study showed some important informations related to the authorial voice in undergraduate students' thesis writing. For example, from the theses collection, it can be inferred that the authors most likely to use prepositional words inaccordingly, where they don't belong, resulting in awkward sentences in order to write a longer description of the said theses. Hyland's (2008) theory of stance and engagement played a vital role on the students' thesis writing. His theory, which is divided into a  few categories, that involve "hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions". Although the majority of the authors are mainly using boosters and hedges to boost their sentiments regarding the pressing matter they're researching, instead. According to Humphrey, Walton, and Davidson (2013), as of late, an expanding number of high-stakes normalized appraisals have included endeavors to gauge composing capability, and the anticipated evaluations dependent on the CCSS are required to incorporate significantly additionally composing. These evaluations commonly go to advance in the best possible utilization of language structure, accentuation, and different conventions that comprise the mechanics of composing abilities (e.g., Educational Records Agency, 2006; Florida Department of Education FCAT, 2012). Agency here also plays a role as the authors seem to be keen on conveying their opinions throughout the thesis writing journey. Although it may not be shown as obvious as the distinct writing styles' of the respective authors'.  In summary, authorial presences do exist in some of the works of the said authors, albeit it did not come off as strongly, rather very subtly, yet sturdy. But in their subconscious state of mind, they are dousing part of themselves in their works through their writing style and decision making that can be inferred as agency. They showcased what is expected of

high quality writing, in which their writings implied some expressive features.

The finding reveals the truth behind Hyland's (2008) theory of stance and engagement, which played a vital role on the students' thesis writing. Although the majority of the authors are mainly using boosters and hedges to boost their sentiments regarding the pressing matter they're researching, instead, and rarely ever blatantly refers to themselves in first point of view. Agency here also plays a role as the authors seem to be keen on conveying their opinions throughout the thesis writing journey. In summary, authorial presences otherwise known as identity of the authors do exist in some of the works that were being researched, albeit it did not come off as strongly, rather very subtly, yet sturdy.

**References**

Joon, H.(2017): *Textual Voice Elements and Voice Strength in EFL Argumentative Writing.* Michigan State University, United States of America. DOI: 10.1016/j.asw.2017.02.002 1075-2935.

Mitchell, T., Miller, R., Pessoa, S.(2014): *Valued Voices: Students' Use of Engagement in Argumentative History Writing.* Carnegie Mellon University, Qatar. DOI: 10.1016/j.linged.2014.10.002.

Eik-Nes, N., Stock, I.(2016): *Voice Features in Academic Texts - A Review of Empirical Studies.* Department of Language and Literature, University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Norway. DOI: 10.1016/j.jeap.2015.12.006.

Mukminin, A., Ali, R., Ashari, M. (2015): *Voices from Within: Student Teachers' Experiences in English Academic Writing Socialization at One Indonesian Teacher Training Program.* Jambi University, Indonesia. DOI:

Gray, G.(2017): *Academic Voice in Scholarly Writing.* University of Victoria, Canada. DOI:

Young, C., Rasinski, T.(2011): *Enhancing Author's Voice through Scripting.* The Reading Teacher. Vol 65. Issue 1. DOI: 10.1598/RT.65.13

Humphrey, R., Davidson, A., Walton, M.(2014): *Authorial Voice and Conventional Skills in Writing Assessment and Educational Practice.* DOI: 10.1080/00220671.2013.788990.

Storch, N., Morton, J. (2018): *Developing an Authorial Voice in PhD Multilingua Students Writing: The Readers' Perspective.* The University of Melbourne, Carlton, Australia. DOI: 10.1016/j.jslw.2018.02.004.

Robbins, P.(2016): *Finding Your Voice as an Academic Writer (and Writing Clearly).* DOI: 10.1080/10437797.2016.1151267.

Magalhães, M., Cotterall, S., Mideros, D.(2018): *Identity, Voice, and Agency in Two EAL Doctoral Writing Contexts.* DOI: 10.1016/j.jslw.2018.05.001.

Chenoweth, N., Hayes, J. (2003): *The Inner Voice in Writing.* Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. DOI: 10.1177/0741088303253572.

Logan, A.(2013): *Improving Personal Voice in Academic Writing: an Action Inquiry Using Self-reflective Practice.* St. Patrick's College of Education, Drumcondra, Dublin, Ireland. DOI: 10.1080/14623943.2012.732937.

Dipardo, A., Storms, B., Selland, M.(2011): *Seeing Voices: Assessing Writerly Stance in NWP Analytic Writing Continuum.* United States of America. DOI: 10.1016/j.asw.2011.01.003.

Dipardo, A., Storms, B., Selland, M.(2011): *Seeing Voices: Assessing Writerly Stance in NWP Analytic Writing Continuum.* United States of America. DOI: 10.1016/j.asw.2011.01.003