

TEACHING WRITING IN THE AI-RELATED TURMOIL

Writing Is not Writing Per Se (Anymore): My Journey in the AI-related Turmoil

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Abstract

I have been teaching academic writing to undergraduate students in non-anglophone settings where English is used as a medium of instruction for 14 years. This is a self-exploratory essay in which I draw on this experience and reflect on how I modified my teaching and assessment techniques at the outset of ChatGPT's public appearance. I illustrate how by adopting metacognitive and the socio-constructivist approach, I integrated reading and speaking activities to assess learning outcomes in writing. As a result of this effort, I could, to some extent, encourage my students to use artificial intelligence more strategically.

Writing Is not Writing Per Se (Anymore): My Journey in the AI-related Turmoil

‘Again, this impersonal cheesiness... What an artificial blah, blah, blah!’ Weary by the final grading, I am staring at yet another student paper written (obviously!) with the help of Chat GPT (January, 2023)...

Why was Socrates so skeptical of writing? The great philosopher regarded it as an unhelpful engagement by claiming that we tend to deteriorate our memory and incarcerate thoughts in symbols while writing. Consequently, Socrates asserted that writing is likely to cause an illusion of knowledge rather than the creation of it. Written words do not improve us as thinkers, he probably implied. Therefore, Socrates did not have the habit of documenting his vibrant exchange of ideas. Lively spoken interlocutions...this was something he seemed to look for...Did Socrates predict the current situation - the educational confusion posed by students’ use of AI? Was it his anticipation that at some point in the future, writing would be a skill considered unworthy of mastering?

Context

The rapid internationalization of higher education has led to an increase in institutions offering English medium instruction (EMI), particularly in countries where English is not the first language (Brinkschulte et al., 2018; Galloway & Rose, 2021; Macaro et al., 2018). The tendency is rationalized by more employment opportunities for graduates in the evolving market and better access to further international education opportunities. Therefore, characterizing the present-day picture of EMI, Galloway and Ruegg (2020) use expression of ‘the EMI boom’. Accordingly, recent literature makes consistent research calls about global EMI insights (Galloway & Rose, 2021; Galloway & Ruegg, 2020, Macaro, 2020; Rose et al., 2020) in non-anglophone settings. At present, with the recent emergence of AI, such research has become even more necessary, particularly in underrepresented regions of the world such as Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan is a former Soviet republic located in the South Caucasus region of Eurasia. In 1991, the country regained its independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet era, the education system was centrally controlled and emphasized Russian as the main language of instruction, particularly in higher education. Following the liberation, Azerbaijan took significant measures to adjust its education system with international standards (Karimova, 2018). Thus, utilizing EMI played an instrumental role in this process of internationalization. Since 2005, the country joined the Bologna process, which gradually introduced EMI. To this end, at present, a growing number of Azerbaijani universities offer full or partial programs in English.

University where I serve is one of the primary institutions in the country that have adopted EMI. Before being admitted, applicants go through an English proficiency test and take a year-long English course for academic and professional purposes. University has integrated internationally oriented approach with a strong focus on using English both in curricula courses and extra-curricular engagements. It recognizes that graduates' command of the language is essential both for securing competitive job opportunities locally and for accessing broader career prospects internationally. Beyond professional benefits, given the scientifically proven benefits of learning a second language, English proficiency is also regarded as a means of improving students' cognitive development, overall intelligence and critical thinking abilities. Therefore, a great emphasis is placed on writing in English across curriculum.

When ChatGPT emerged in November 2022, most of the academic community seemed to fall into the valley of uncertainty. We were alarmed that university's emphasis on English proficiency is increasingly undermined by extensive AI use, as many students rely on such tools mostly for their written assignments. This overdependence puts both language acquisition and advancement of intelligence at risk. Specifically, the turmoil gripped us, the teachers of the Writing Department - me and my colleagues. Now, all the concerns about students' plagiarism were even intensified with the ChatGPT-*crafted* essays.

It implied that we had to deal with a new ghost writer who was even harder to identify. Yet, what worried us, teachers, most was the potential loss of our students' skills and knowledge rather than policing them and causing stress. To me, this, by default, implied a threat to learning deeper analysis, evaluation, meaningful structuring and cohesion rather than the loss of linguistic abilities. Trite as it might sound, as an academic writing teacher teaching in an EMI setting, harnessing my students' love of the writing process and thinking skills - rather than writing per se - is a core of my teaching philosophy.

In this self-explorative essay, I reflect on how I modified my teaching and assessment techniques at the outset of ChatGPT's public appearance by encouraging my students to love the process of writing and use AI more strategically through *the read-like-a-writer* technique. In the first section of this chapter, I elaborate on why writing in a second language holds a crucial role in thinking; accordingly, artificial intelligence should be approached strategically to foster this potential. Following the discussion of this advantage, I illustrate how collaborative metacognition in a second language could be an efficient approach for academic writing students to encourage them to use AI more strategically. Based on my approach, in the third section of the chapter, I illustrate an example of how I use a text in my class to integrate reading and discussion into my assessment by using collaborative metacognition in light of my metacognitive purposes.

Defining *Generative*: Recognizing the Need for New Assessment

In 'The Curious Writer', Ballenger (2011) contends that a strong composition theme is 'an itch you need to scratch' (p.75). When one is not certain about ideas before taking a pen or typing, writing turns into an inquiry and invites the creation of deeper and more critical thoughts. Generating new standpoints happens through the workflow, not by waiting for an inspiration to write. And this, I might have known intuitively before I explicitly saw such statements in books about composition.

However, writing is sometimes defined as a channel between *the thought-in-mind* and *the thought-on-paper*. If accepted from this perspective, as a means of merely responding to certain topics

by pouring down what we have in mind, Socrates' approach could make a lot of sense. Yet, a more helpful way of thinking about composition is accepting it a *thought-generation* process – an itch which needs scratching where the writer does not necessarily develop a definite response in the prewriting stage, as Ballenger (2011) thoughtfully puts it. This opposes the idea of merely responding to questions.

By projecting this approach to my EMI context, to me, writing in English as a second language and its teaching have always been immensely *generative* - generative of a new culture, new thoughts and new knowledge. While writing in a second language the thought-generation process happens even more intensively compared to native language writing since the writer immerses herself in a new culture and worldview. Thanks to this generation of ideas, the second language writer is enabled to look at topics from completely different angles and develop new beliefs in the process rather than express the already existing ones. Due to this generative power, writing in a second language could be treated not only as a means of communication including non-native words but also as a medium for developing previously unfamiliar thoughts (Riehl, 2021).

But now, another *generative* power, *generative AI*, as they call it, yet generative in a slightly different sense, has emerged. And it apparently has the potential to steal the above advantages of the former, I thought. I found myself quite unsettled by these circumstances. Students' ChatGPT-written essays, to me, seemed to be to the detriment of true learning. My first thought at this stage was that we run the risk of having an overwhelming number of learners who pass our courses failing to unlock this potential of writing in a different language. Accordingly, our students, as my concern dictated, might be limited in terms of generating knowledge by properly playing with written form of the second language they use.

In the age in which human writing is declining and reliance on convenience is increasing, I might have been easily reckoned as a traditionalist by many. This skepticism about the benefits of the present situation carried my heavy emotional investment into the matter, which, I confess, was also intensified

by a selfish approach to the profession and a wish to increase its value. My initial reaction was that the practice of writing and its instruction must not be allowed to decline due to AI usage of our students, as they are indispensable to the development of reasoning, reflection, and scholarly engagement. AI cannot substitute for the intellectual and pedagogical functions that writing and its instruction uniquely provide.

Yet despite this right-wing approach, taking an objective standpoint while maintaining caution, I attempted to convince myself that in this context, another option for me was viewing AI as a challenger of my established teaching methods rather than an enemy of them to explore various new models and refresh the old ones. Historically speaking, I had to acknowledge that each major shift in society has posed new challenges to teaching methods and required educators to adapt their approaches accordingly. For instance, globalization prompted communicative teaching methods to address increasingly interconnected and linguistically diverse classrooms (Block & Cameron, 2001). Today, accordingly, the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence should be accepted as merely another transformation demanding that our teaching methods be reimagined. This, conceivably, implies stepping out of our comfort zones to support contemporary learning more effectively. Consequently, looking at the challenge through these specific binoculars - coming up with something that truly worked for my students' learning in this context seemed to be a necessity.

Reading and Discussing Like a Writer: Collaborative Metacognition in Second Language Writing

As different realizations of the Process Movement in composition pedagogy, three paradigms are broadly distinguished in the literature about teaching writing: cognitivism, expressivism and social constructivism. Cognitivism is about instructing writers towards the best commonly accepted practice and writing rules, focusing on 'the actual act of composing' (Friedrich, 2008, p.13) and making a written piece as accurate as possible. Expressivists, on the other hand, aim to discover the writer (mostly, the creative writer) and her authentic voice rather than the correct writing, believing that to unleash the individual voice in writing is mainly a matter of consistent practice which leads to self-discovery. For

social constructivists, however, to navigate through written language and knowledge, writers and instructors should consider what comprises their social and historical surroundings and develop collaborative arguments as continuation of collective knowledge (Friedrich, 2008; Johns, 1995; Murphy & Sherwood, 1995).

A more rational teaching approach in writing should, of course, be a balanced blend of these three, emphasizing one or the other based on individual needs and circumstances of learners; however, practice demonstrates that accentuating one that the teacher thoroughly knows and strongly believes in yields more favorable learning outcomes. Given my standpoint on teaching second language writing in an EMI setting, I find myself more compelled to advocate more for the socio-constructivist view out of the three paradigms of teaching writing. And from where I stand, intelligence is best advanced when it is discovered collaboratively since knowledge is and ought to remain a collective accomplishment of humankind. Therefore, my belief is that scholarly writing in a second language should serve thought generation in the given socio-historical stage rather than expression or even less so, accurate expression. This can also be seen as the ultimate goal that all academic writing classes should aspire to achieve.

Based on this socio-constructivist approach to learning and knowledge, I became particularly interested in the concept of collaborative metacognition which I encountered in Smith and Mancy's (2017) work. They define it as 'metacognition which can be identified as having contributed to, or arisen as a result of, group processes (or collaborative talk)' (p.28). Their empirical study, albeit undertaken in the field of mathematics, finds that metacognitive talk was more likely to meet the criteria for collaboration than any other form of talk, and that transactive (reciprocal) talk often preceded or followed metacognitive utterances. This suggests that collaboration can stimulate metacognition and vice versa. The authors also underscore that students demonstrating higher levels of metacognitive interaction solve mathematical problems more successfully. Additionally, awareness about metacognition, as the study claims, is a crucial aspect that teachers should work with to improve

knowledge generation. This, simply put, implies that knowledge is not only reflection, but it can also be constructed in collaboration. All of these findings sparked my interest in putting the concept of collaborative metacognition into my own practice in writing classes.

However, even before I encountered this concept, my initial inspiration to explore collaborative dimensions of thinking originated from Bunn's (2011) read-like-a-writer technique. Bunn's approach encourages students to read texts not merely for comprehension but with a writer's awareness. He advises attending to rhetorical choices, structural decisions, and linguistic strategies that constitute the meaning of the text. In doing so, as he believes, learners become more conscious of the authorial processes behind written works, which enhances a metacognitive stance toward both reading and writing.

Prior to the confusion around AI in education, I had already implemented activities that stimulated knowledge construction through interaction, albeit informally. I often prompted students to reflect on their choices of ideas, evidence, and organizational structures in their papers, and facilitated a range of peer- and group-based discussions. Yet, because these activities were not part of formal assessment, I remained uncertain about their measurable contribution to actual learning outcomes.

Upon revisiting Bunn's (2011) technique in light of Smith and Mancy's (2017) conceptualization of collaborative metacognition, I recognized a new pedagogical potential. I sensed that collaborative metacognition could be even more powerful in a second language. If students consciously attend to the steps involved in composing a text in a new language and collaboratively reflect on how writers make rhetorical and linguistic decisions, they may begin to approach both writing and the use of AI tools more thoughtfully. Through explicit discussion of writers' choices, students can jointly construct new understandings of composition, develop aesthetic and strategic appreciation for writing, and deepen their awareness of its cognitive processes. Consequently, I hoped that this approach would lead them to generate more specific and informed AI prompts. For example, as a result of collaborative

metacognition, my students could move beyond simplistic requests such as “write an argumentative essay for me” toward more reflective and purposeful uses of technology in writing.

Classroom Practice

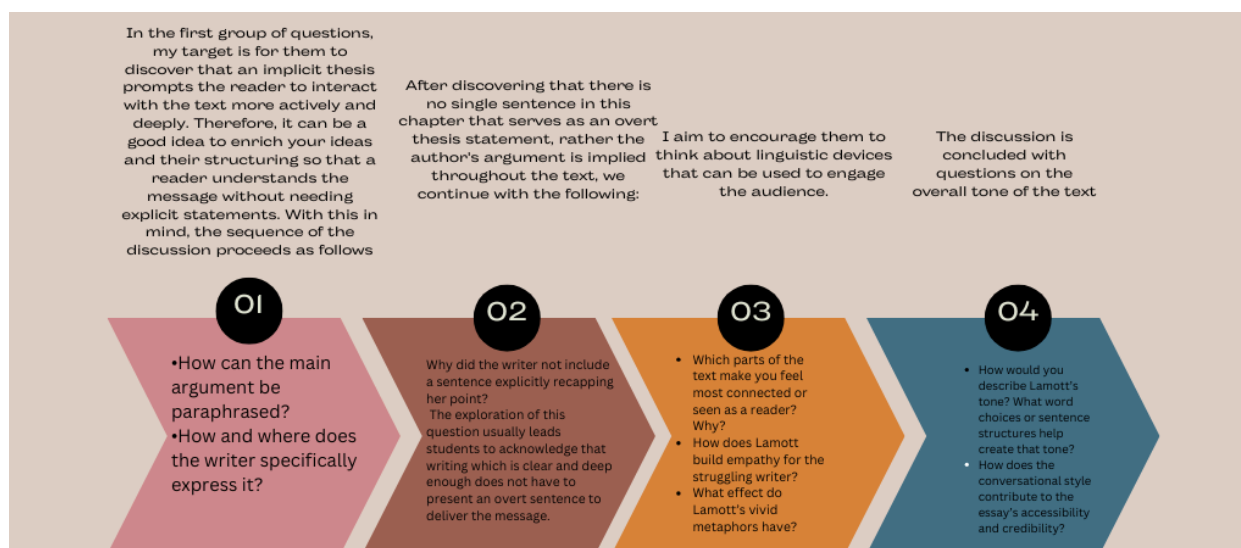
To illustrate, prior to applying collaborative metacognition, the majority of the graded assignments in my compulsory writing class used to be take-home essays, in which students applied what they learned during in-class practice and consultation hours. To my dismay, however, the nature of this type of *written-only* assessment seemed to allow ample opportunities for violating academic integrity by applying AI tools to different extents; no matter how hard we, writing instructors, attempted to adopt a wide range of tactics against this harmful practice. This included checking first drafts and second drafts to monitor the consistency of students’ progress. Additionally, we required reflections on the writing process to establish authenticity, hoping that this could verify if the student had been working. Nevertheless, I still sensed that albeit being efficacious to a certain point, these attempts did not prove to be entirely successful for excluding ChatGPT temptations; some of my learners did not fully benefit from the generative potential of writing, in its traditional and true sense. Therefore, ultimately, I decided to deepen our formal engagement with discussion and reading rather than writing itself as a part of the course assessment.

A book chapter named ‘Short Assignments’ by Lamott (1995) is one of the texts I used. I advertently selected a text that could resonate more specifically with my students’ contexts and situations including their current challenges with academic writing. In this piece, by *short assignments*, the author implies how productive writing can be when this process is viewed as a combination of small steps, each completed at a time. Albeit written nearly thirty years ago, Lamott’s chapter still remains very relevant to my students and their violations with AI. Many of them struggle with similar anxieties and procrastination vividly depicted by the author, and in an attempt to cope and find intellectual shortcuts, resort to AI.

While assigning this text for homework, prior to the class discussion, I firstly ask learners to apply the *reading-like-a-writer* technique suggested by Bunn (2011). Then, in the following class, I present a list of metacognitive questions based on this technique, which they discuss as a group. These collaborative discovery-based discussions are conducted in Socratic circles, in which students themselves are mostly in charge of navigating. Therefore, they have to be more cautious and critical not only of others' thoughts, but also of their own. First, the inner circle exchanges responses with my minimal intervention. Below, I visualize this discussion cycle by outlining the questions of the first discussion and my metacognitive purposes aligned with them.

Figure 1

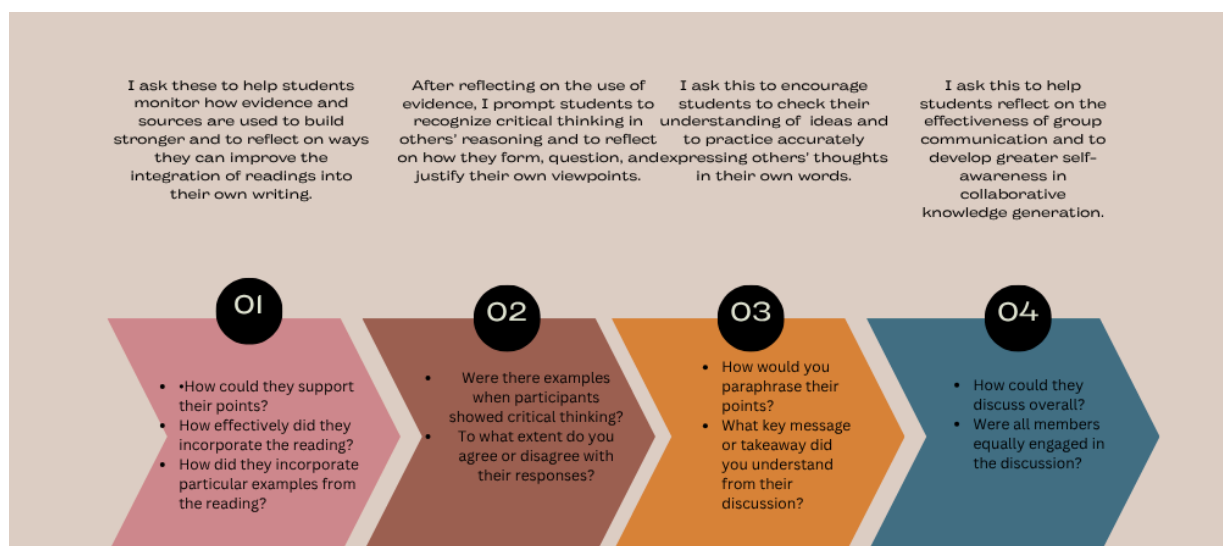
Discussion of the First Group



Following the first discussion, the teams swap places and the second team starts evaluating the previous talk, referring to the following questions:

Figure 2

Discussion of the Second Group



These questions could advance metacognition in second language writing by prompting learners to reflect on how ideas were constructed, supported, and communicated. By evaluating the incorporation of readings, the strength of support, and the relevance of examples, students can monitor their understanding of second language academic conventions. Questions about participation and dominance encourage awareness of collaboration dynamics and could help my students recognize how collaborative dialogue supports idea generation.

Finally, I ask students to individually reflect on the Socratic discussion. My reading of the students' responses suggested that at least some students appeared to plan a more strategic use of AI in writing for their own benefit. Below are some excerpts ¹.

Aysel:

Reading like a writer helps me pay attention to how ideas are structured, how tone is created, and how arguments develop. Reading like a writer grants the reader the ability to feel the tone and the message of the author through his perspective. AI cannot feel the emotions like a human; thus, it does not really express the readers message precisely

Nurlan:

While reading like a writer, we notice some patterns, and think as if we can use them, or not.

Sevda:

Reading like a writer helps me improve my writing skills because it shows me how authors organize their ideas and use the evidence in an effective way. However, I believe I will still use AI, especially for brainstorming my ideas as a first draft. I believe that the best way is to find a balance of using AI and reading like a writer on your own. By doing this, I can learn from good writing while keeping my own creativity.

Gunay:

Reading like a writer technique seems to give us ample confidence and authentic style of writing without overrelying on AI usage for nonsense. It will lead us to utilize AI tools for more reasonable and rationale purposes, not for trivial and basic actions which depends on the level of our laziness level. Writers, at the end, get to the point that they have to retain their critical thinking skills, creativity which was embedded to their souls since birth even though they apply AI scripts added to their drafting works.

Bahram:

It would be helpful to the AI researchers to express what they are seeking in the correct way. They would be aware of how to ask AI what they want from it. As a result, AI would give the desired responds easily.

Zahra:

When I read like a writer, I pay attention to how the author structures ideas and uses his tone in his writing. It can impact my AI usage, one example is, instead of asking AI to improve my writing, or write wholly for me, I can rather ask it to explain the article's structure and help me understand how to re-create a similar one.

Gulnar:

I feel that such technique as “reading like a writer” could reduce the usage of AI. I mean that if we are 100% confident in what and how we write, the usage of AI would decrease.

Mehin:

After that discussion, I should use AI more wisely. I learned how authors build emotion and structure. This way, I can create writing that sounds more realistic, authentic, and personal.

Zeynal:

Reading like a writer can change how I use AI in writing because it helps me notice how good writing is built. When I study how writers use words and organize ideas, I can ask AI to write in a clearer and more thoughtful way. This will help me edit AI’s work and make it sound more natural and personal. With the help of reading like a writer I will use AI as a tool, instead of depending from it fully.

Kamal:

The line of the Use of AI in writing is very thin, when used way too little writer can miss out on a very helpful tool while when overusing it, the damage may be done to your writing. Because AI doesn’t think like a human it can miss some points so you have be very careful with it. So, reading like a writer technique may alter ai use and make the use very productive and to the point.

Implications

With all due respect to Socrates, I humbly believe that writing does have the full potential to be of benefit; particularly writing in a second language can construct deep thinking and is not exclusively a means of appearing-but-not-being intelligent. Ironically, I am also convinced that this potential of writing in a second language can be achieved through the approach that Socrates himself employed -

collaborative discovery of knowledge and ignorance. As a matter of fact, the socio-constructivist approach itself can be traced back to the Socratic methods. It is known that the great philosopher was not inclined to lecture his followers; he preferred to have meaningful dialogues on certain subjects by initiating thought formulation, solving problems, reaching certain conclusions by themselves and most certainly, taking new perspectives.

Yet, I do not necessarily agree with Socrates' claim that speaking should replace writing; however, reading and speaking should serve as foundations for generating ideas in the process of writing in a second language. Determining the value of writing depends on how it is viewed. Writing is not writing per se anymore. And learning to write in a second language definitely is not. It is rather a blend of generating previously unfamiliar ideas through reading and discussing. Therefore, securing EMI students' active learning requires embracing the AI challenge, adaptive teaching and refreshed methods more than ever in EMI settings. Collaborative metacognition seems to have the potential to help students appreciate the process of writing and motivate them to write and avoid overreliance on AI.

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Footnotes

¹Students' reflections are reproduced verbatim to preserve the authenticity of their voice and expression. Grammatical or lexical errors have not been corrected, as they form part of the natural language use observed in the study.