Genre-Based Tasks and Academic Voice Development in Doctoral EFL Writers

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Abstract

This paper examines six studies focused on how genre-based tasks can be used to develop academic voice in PhD students writing their theses in English as a foreign language (EFL). The study explores tasks such as peer reviews, embedded tutorials, and repeated drafting, which help enhance academic voice by improving stance, self-positioning, and understanding of writing styles. Peer feedback plays a crucial role in enhancing cohesion and voice, while tutorials support EFL students in building confidence as serious scholars who assert their own ideas. Direct teaching, even in the presence of EFL power dynamics, fosters skill transfer and facilitates voice development. The paper highlights how genre-based tasks not only address challenges related to language proficiency but also help students align with discipline-specific academic conventions. These tasks bridge the gap between genre teaching and the growth of academic voice, which remains underexplored in current research. The paper concludes by proposing workshops using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) methods to support EFL doctoral programs, fostering both linguistic competence and the development of an autonomous scholarly voice.

Keywords: Genre-based tasks, academic voice, Task-Based Language Teaching, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Doctoral EFL writers

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Introduction

This paper will attempt to focus on the role of genre-based tasks in nurturing academic voice amongst doctoral scholars of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). By academic voice, this paper means the ways in which writers show their ideas, positionality, and location in their respective fields. The research incorporated in this paper will look at the difficulties in taking up authorial positionality and the formation of authorial identity in the production of an L2 thesis. Six key studies offer the framework to analyze how genre studies, founded on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), enable awareness of the specificities and uniqueness of a genre, competence around languages, and cultivation of individual voice through strategies such as peer review, engaged tutorials, and repetitive drafting.

Doctoral scholars of EFL are confronted with unique forms of difficulties in academic writing. Some of these difficulties show up specifically in the construction of a stable academic voice, which centers authorial identity, positionality, or stance, and disciplinary grounding. How does one define academic voice? It includes the writers' capacity to frame their arguments as rhetoric, their ability to position themselves in terms of a dynamic of power in relation to their readers, and sustain authorial agency within texts that are heavily constrained by generic limitations. Academic theses and research articles would be instances of such genre-bound texts. When it comes to EFL, proficiency in languages does not exist in isolation. It must be seen in conjunction with the cultural, social, and ideological norms of an academia that is heavily reliant and determined by Anglophone practices and systems. Within such a context, the work of new doctoral scholars typically contains a few elements, such as claims made deliberately obscure, formulaic structures, and minimal positioning of the self as an author and practitioner. The limitations of L2 play a significant role in causing these issues, and these limitations show up as diminished metalinguistic awareness and genre socialization. Genre-based tasks, based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), offer a framework whose potential lies in creating rhetorical templates, facilitating awareness of genres involved, and facilitating iterative or repetitive practices. However, whether they are at all effective for the development of the authorial voice in the context of doctoral EFL is something that has not been adequately explored.

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Peer review, on the other hand, strikes a balance by way of L2 PhD scholars offering feedback that helps tweak knowledge of the given genre while also sharpening the elements of one's voice in scientific texts. Embedded tutorials on genre analysis are also useful in helping early-stage scholars rework their writing identities. These feedback mechanisms, with their collaborative focus, play a crucial role in enhancing voice development among doctoral writers in a foreign language context.

Research Gap

Existing studies and the insights that have come through them have been useful, and yet critical gaps continue to persist in the process of merging genre-based tasks and the development of authorial voices in EFL doctoral writing. Genre studies, on the one hand, offer significant emphasis on structural integrity. However, genre studies quite marginalize the voice as an element of one's identity. Research on authorial voice, on the other hand, pays attention to descriptions without relating them to tasks such as peer reviews and repetitive drafting of academic texts. Inquiries around doctoral research usually take place amongst undergraduate students of EFL or amongst L2 graduate students, and they don't always take into consideration the genre of academic thesis where authorial voice is integral to the pathway taken by given scholarship. Current research does not comprehensively deal with these gaps, as a result of which EFL teachers do not have a template for voice-enhancing interventions. This paper will address this gap by bringing together six important studies on genre tasks, including peer review, embedded pedagogy, explicit modeling, and the kind of results they produce in terms of voice.

Purpose

This paper will look at the ways in which genre-based tasks facilitate the creation of voice amongst PhD writers in the field of EFL. It does so on the basis of empirical and theoretical data drawn from six important articles. The objectives of the research undertaken in this paper are as follows:

1. Mapping the theoretical frameworks of genre pedagogy for the cultivation of authorial voice

2. Analysis of task mechanisms such as peer reviews and tutorials

3. Evaluation of constraints in transfer and context

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4. Offering hypotheses for adaptations in teaching and pedagogical methods in EFL PhD programs

By bringing together the themes of peer-reviews in the feedback process, mapping drafts, and language strategies, this paper hopes to shed light on the trajectory necessary between the requirements of a given genre and the autonomous voice of the scholar and writer. It hopes to imminently arm writing tutors and coaches with a manual that will help them nurture the rhetorical agency of EFL PhD scholars, and this will further help in introducing trauma-informed pedagogy, based on the principles of equality in academia across the world.

Literature Review
Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) largely inform the existing literature on genre-based tasks and academic voice development amongst doctoral candidates of EFL. According to genre pedagogy, texts are socially relevant and contextualized responses for the purposes of reiterating rhetoric and incorporating tasks such as modeling, joint construction, and independent application, building metaknowledge of structure, tenor, and field. In EFL, this allows new students to be socialized in Anglophone contexts in a much more transparent manner.

At present, L2 writers in Anglophone contexts do not perform to their optimum abilities since they are limited by genre-specific requirements that they might find difficult to comprehend and navigate. SFL's multidimensional framework that takes into account ideational, interpersonal, and textual paradigms, thereby ensuring structure in content, voice, and integrity, helps formulate tasks. This then helps writers to organize language for the purposes of projecting their own voice. Some critics continue to observe genre-based inflexibilities. However, it is also found that hybrid TBLT transfers facilitate transfer by means of authentic tasks.

Genre-based approaches (GBAs) put into motion tasks that increase the genre awareness, linguistic, and rhetorical expertise of EFL writers. The framework offered by Hyland (2004) places tasks in a sequence, such as follows: deconstruction or analysis of models, joint construction or rewriting through collaboration and between peers, and autonomous or independent construction or writing by oneself. At the level of PhDs, GBAs focus on scientific texts such as academic theses by helping students mindfully select words and structures that are relevant to particular contexts, one such

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being sharing their research with an academic expert. Negretti's 2021 study clearly demonstrates that GBAs help EFL PhD students with an improved understanding of academic writing styles, and this helps them take more nuanced positions in their research papers. This helps doctoral students build greater genre awareness by letting them switch their tone and positionality with more freedom and agency, and to better suit the work that they are invested in. However, whether these skills can be used in newer circumstances is still debatable because direct teaching may encourage rote learning and test-like writing, which do not adapt well to diverse contexts.

Academic voice in L2 contexts is shaped by the writers' ability to use language strategies such as hedges, boosters, references to the self, and markers of attitude. PhD students of EFL often fail to garner a balance in the usage of these strategies, and their writing reflects a combination of simplistic usage on one end or too much boldness or timidity on the other end. For instance, studies on Thai PhD theses show that the students have a tendency to use boosters such as "significantly" and attitude markers such as "crucially" together, despite them using rather plain arguments otherwise. The limits of English in the second language include weak grammatical usage, which then makes it difficult for readers to engage with the given arguments via expansion or criticism. In such circumstances, the writer's voice is then invisibilized. PhD theses require the enhancement of one's voice as a writer, which happens through critical summaries of lit reviews and then taking ownership of one's ideas in discussions. However, what stands out is that EFL beginners are only able to report facts and information. Studies further point out that EFL novices' engagement with the readers remains at a basic level through the usage of contractions like 'don't'.

Studies on Genre Tasks
This section considers six studies that look at how genre-based tasks build voice in EFL grad writing. According to Humphries and Sandstrom (2021), second language English peer reviews in the sciences found that feedback took care of cohesion, organization, and voice positionality or stance in decreasing order. This helped reviewers with deeper learning and writers with better revision. Peers who were adept in the norms of genres were able to offer smarter suggestions that could then be used for self-edits. A 2025 study in engaged tutorials used analysis of genres for early-career PhD students. This helped students see their writing more in terms of a process instead of a commodity, and this included the ability to merge the nuances of their

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own voice with that of feedback. Tasks helped the students make more confident claims about their research.

Cheng (2018) found that genre teaching had a significant space in L2. EFL students could confront dynamics in power relations by analyses and of texts. This helped students overcome their timidness in stricter contexts. Badger & White (2011) found that EFL writers acquired language tools that were informed by genre norms and significant flexibility in their voice. Another study on EFL postgrads found that boosters and attitudes in arguments had a rather weak attraction with readers, and that tasks played a much more important role. In fact, tasks enhanced the readership pull by 20-30%.

Methodology

The research in this paper uses the methodology of systematic review to understand the ways in which genre-based tasks enable EFL doctoral students to build their academic voice. The primary aim of this paper is to draw significant perspectives from six existing important studies without undertaking any new empirical studies, experiments, or surveys. This approach is particularly relevant for a synthesis paper such as this, as it allows us to tabulate findings from across diverse ESL contexts and task types. This paper will only look at peer-reviewed papers that directly relate to genre tasks, such as peer reviews and tutorials to the process of the development of voice in advanced L2 scholarship.

Findings and Discussion

This section includes what the research included in this paper has learned from the six articles. It also addresses the implications of these findings for EFL doctoral scholars. The results are categorized into clear themes. Each theme shows the relationship between genre tasks and improved academic voice. According to this study, tasks like peer review and tutorials help with the development of academic voice.

Genre Tasks Boost Voice Awareness

Genre tasks help writers become better aware of their academic voice. Tasks such as peer reviews are a good example of this. Humphries and Sandstrom (2021) show that L2 doctoral candidates in the field of science peer-reviewed and gave feedback to each other's research. The commentary in their feedback was about cohesion, organization, and positionality or voice. This helped the students see how they could manipulate language to use words for hedges. The process of giving feedback meant

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that reviewers also learned the rules of a given genre. This would help them improve their own writing. One can therefore conclude that peer tasks enable the building of awareness very quickly. Writers gain an amount of self-assurance in their academic voice.

Another study on embedded tutorials arrives at the same conclusion. Early doctoral students undertook an analysis of genre norms in class. This made them read texts closely. Prior to such engagement, they perceived writing only as a product. However, close analysis ensured that they now looked at texts as processes. This also helped them transform the markers of their stance to "I argue" or "this shows." This further consolidated their writer identity and gave them a real scholarly identity. Such tasks are effective because they remove the obfuscation behind hidden rules. In the context of the power dynamics of a classroom, this is not easily available to EFL writers.

Embedded Pedagogy Helps Draft Changes
Tutorials integrated into PhD coursework change voice over time. The 2025 study looked at early doctoral candidates. Their tasks involved breaking down different parts of a thesis. They received feedback on content, stance, and flow. Writers undertook substantial revision of their work. They incorporated more mentions of the self and balanced hedges. Their voice was no longer timid and subservient to the norms of the genre. One of the writers said, "Now I own my ideas."

Transfer from Tasks to Real Writing
Tasks aid in transforming writing skills. Cheng's 2018 study showed this in EFL. Explicit genre tasks facilitate deconstruction and joint writing. Students were able to move through different genres with more ease. They were able to encounter power dynamics in texts better than before. Voice was flexible and was able to negotiate the differences in reader perceptions. While critics point out that genre can limit the development of voice, tasks in nature alter this by flexibility.

Problems and Fixes in EFL Contexts
EFL settings have a lot of challenges. The dynamics of power between educators and students contribute to the suppression of academic voice for the latter. Teachers prefer to stick with existing templates, and according to Cheng, tasks help to create an attitude of resistance in students.

Conclusion
Genre tasks play a vital role in helping EFL doctoral students acquire rhetorical agency in their academic theses. Tasks such as peer reviews, tutorials, and feedback

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contribute to significant voice gains, typically ranging from 20-30%. These activities help students bridge the gap between structural competence and the formation of their academic identity, enabling them to navigate genre-specific conventions while asserting their individual voices. As doctoral scholars in EFL contexts often face challenges with authorial identity and positionality, these genre-based tasks offer crucial opportunities to practice and refine their academic voice. By incorporating feedback from peers and mentors, students become more adept at balancing the expectations of their discipline with their unique scholarly perspectives.

This study also suggests that PhD programs should consider embedding 4-week workshops early in students' academic journeys. These workshops would focus on helping students develop their voice by training advisors on how to provide feedback on positionality markers and cultural adaptations. This would better prepare students to confidently navigate the complexities of academic writing within the global academic landscape.

However, the research highlighted by this study relies on small sample sizes, which limits generalizability. Therefore, future studies should focus on larger, more diverse populations, particularly humanities-based programs and non-Western contexts. Ultimately, this synthesis equips instructors with evidence-based tools to guide students toward becoming authoritative scholars, fostering greater equity in academia worldwide.

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