CHAPTER 30.

USING AI TOOLS DETRACTS FROM STUDENT VOICE ✨ *NOT EVERY USE OF AI DETRACTS FROM STUDENT VOICE*

Xiao Tan
Utah State University

Paul Kei Matsuda
Arizona State University

Since ChatGPT made its public debut in November 2022, there has been no shortage of debates about the impacts of large language models (LLMs) on writing. Writing teachers, in particular, are concerned about students losing their voice when using generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in completing writing assignments, since LLMs tend to spit out texts that sound formulaic and robotic when responding to simple prompts. In "Generative AI: The voice of the other," Craig A. Meyer (2023), a rhetoric professor, described his experience of encountering a student text written by ChatGPT, in which "'other' voice was omnipresent, almost oppressive" (p. 1). In explaining how using GenAI impairs students' voice, Meyer (2023) cited a case of awkward vocabulary choice (i.e., "demerits") in an AI-generated argumentative essay, which to him was "the blinking-I-was-written-by-AI light" (p. 3). Meyer is not the only concerned professor. Lesley Vos (2023), another teacher with a linguistics background, also decries that "AI tools destroy a student's writing voice," urging teachers to seek alternative ways of teaching that discourages the use of GenAI.

While these teachers' concerns about the potential negative impact of GenAI are not baseless, the claim that using AI tools destroys student voice seems to assume that human voice and machine "voice" are mutually exclusive, competing entities. This assumption is evident in the title of Meyer's article where the voice of GenAI is positioned as "the other." Under this assumption, the loss of student voice is often described as the page being occupied or "oppressed" (Meyer, 2023, p. 1) by machine-generated texts that possess different linguistic and discourse features than what the teacher expects from the student. Characterizing

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the phenomenon as the destruction of the student voice also invokes the war metaphor where the winning party (machine voice) replaces the defeated party (student voice). These assumptions, however, do not take into consideration the full complexity of voice construction and GenAI usage in writing. In this chapter, we examine the problems of the "bad idea" that using GenAI only detracts from student voice, and propose a better way to understand voice in an GenAI-involved writing context as a cumulative effect of discourse features, technological interventions, and the writer's agentive choices (Matsuda, 2001).

The first problem with this "bad idea" is that the judgment of student voice being destroyed is made solely by teachers who align their evaluation with their expectations of a student's ability and performance. In Meyer's case, for example, a deviation in word choice (i.e., using a less common word "demerits") could be a warning sign of voice loss. Presumably, Meyer's students were all native English speakers, but a similar situation can be interpreted differently by the teacher when the student is writing in a second language (L2). When working with L2 writers, some teachers adopt a deficit view when conjecturing students' voices. In Katarzyna Alexander et al. (2023), for example, six writing teachers were asked to evaluate whether the four sample essays were written, fully or partially, by L2 students or GenAI. In forming their judgments, the participants drew on errors as an indicator of authentic L2 output, while associating a high level of technical and grammatical accuracy and sophisticated language use with AI-generated texts. In both cases, the teachers attribute textual features that do not align with their expectations for the student group to GenAI intervention on writing.

These instances suggest a reader-centric view in declaring the lack of student voice in AI-assisted writing, which largely neglects student agency in writing. It is possible that the reader's expectation for an authentic voice, sometimes based on a biased view of a particular population, is at odds with the voice that students themselves want to convey. At least in high-stakes scenarios, such as academic publishing, being able to produce "accent free" writing that follows canonical linguistic and discourse conventions is advantageous for L2 writers and therefore highly desirable. Writers who leverage GenAI tools to achieve this goal should be viewed as taking an agentic and purposeful act of constructing certain textual identities, rather than thoughtlessly foregoing their voices.

Another problem with the "bad idea" is that it overlooks the complicated processes of writing in which GenAI use could be integrated. When illustrating the destructive power of GenAI, teachers usually cite cases where the student mindlessly substitutes their writing with machine generated texts (Meyer, 2023). However, this is not the only way, and probably not the most common way, in which GenAI is employed. This point is illustrated in an article entitled "I'm a student. You have no idea how much we're using ChatGPT" by Owen Kichizo Terry (2023),

an undergraduate student from Columbia University. In writing a six-page close reading of the Iliad, Terry (2023) prompted ChatGPT to first generate a debatable point, based on which he used ChatGPT to identify sub-arguments and supporting evidence. He then followed the outline to develop his own writing, while modifying the structure where he "deem(ed) the computer's reasoning flawed or lackluster." The use of GenAI tools for brainstorming, outlining, revising, and editing, instead of generating the entire draft, are largely sanctioned by university AI policies and can help shape a student writer's voice but not necessarily weaken it. In some cases, using GenAI might actually enhance voice by helping writers locate linguistic resources that more accurately represent the intended meanings or arguments, which is an important indicator of voice intensity (Wang et al., 2025; Zhao, 2013). The complex collaboration between human and GenAI in writing is also nicely theorized by Cydney Alexis and Theresa Merrick Cassidy (2026).

A better way to understand the concept of voice in an AI-involved writing context is perhaps to see voice as a cumulative effect of discourse features, technological interventions, and the writer's agentive choices (Matsuda, 2001). Instead of positioning GenAI as writing tools with destructive power, we might consider how "humans compose within dynamic assemblages involving multiple agencies" (McKnight, 2021, p. 448). In other words, writing could be seen as a collaborative act between humans and machines, where digital tools, algorithms, and artificial intelligence contribute meaningfully to the creation and development of texts (Matsuda, 2001; McKnight, 2021).

In many contexts beyond writing classrooms, especially in journalism and the art industry, human-machine synergy has become a widely accepted mode of content creation. The outcomes of such collaborations are artworks and pieces of texts that are perceived to possess qualities, such as emotional, intentional, aesthetic, and creative capacities, typically ascribed to humans (Demmer et al., 2023; Hitsuwari et al., 2023). In Jimpei Hitsuwari et al.'s (2023) study of haiku poetry, the AI-created poems with human intervention even outperformed those created independently by humans in perceived aesthetic value, suggesting that the incorporation of AI tools does not always lead to works devoid of human elements. It is therefore reasonable to expect that human-machine collaboration could also produce texts containing appropriate and clear voices manifested in the choices of discursive and non-discursive features (Matsuda, 2001).

In teaching, it is important that we help students become more aware of what voice is appropriate and desirable in different rhetorical situations. Instead of telling students that "using AI tools will make your paper sound voiceless," we can help them understand what voice is, how it is constructed by writers and readers, and what factors play a role in shaping one's voice. There are several successful examples of using GenAI tools to teach rhetorical moves, genre conventions, writing style,

among many other writing-related concepts (see *TextGenEd*, 2023, edited by Vee et al.). The same approach could be adopted to teach the concept of voice. For example, teachers could ask students to experiment with GenAI by having GenAI tools revise the same text with different voices and then explain the principles used in the adaptations. Such activities engage students in the critical and metacognitive exploration of voice, thus helping them develop the ability and awareness of purposeful AI use, an important component of AI literacy (MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing and AI, 2024). Through these activities, teachers could help students develop a nuanced understanding of voice as the negotiation between the author's representation of their textual identity and the reader's perception of such identity. It is also important for students to understand how the involvement of technologies, together with their agentive choices, can create synergistic effects on voice construction (Tan et al., 2025).

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