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Castledown

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ChatGPT, a new “Ghostwriter”: a teacher-and-students poetic autoethnography from an EMI academic writing class

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Abstract

Since its launch in late 2022, ChatGPT has generated both excitement and concern among language professionals in applied linguistics. Although various organizations, publishers, and institutions have introduced guidelines to address this phenomenon, these top-down approaches often neglect the nuanced experiences and perspectives of L2 academic writing teachers and their students. This study aims to bridge this gap by centering on the experiences of one EFL writing teacher and two international students in an undergraduate academic writing course in an English medium program in a Thai private university. In this class, students engaged in writing, reading, and discussions about what it means to be an academic writer in the age of generative AI. By employing collaborative poetic autoethnography, we argue that ChatGPT is more than just a tool or assistant; it has become a ubiquitous “ghostwriter” that requires careful navigation. Drawing on the poems, reflections, freewriting samples, and drafts collected from January to May 2024, the present study provides critical insights into ethical and effective integration of ChatGPT in EFL academic writing classes. The study also contributes to the domain of digital applied linguistics through depicting the opportunities and challenges presented by AI technologies in language and literacy education.

Keywords: poetic autoethnography; ChatGPT; L2 academic writing; ethics

Introduction

Since its launch in late 2022, ChatGPT has played an increasingly important role in EFL writing. It is common that EFL writing teachers may find their students’ writing impeccable: Its grammar is correct, its tone intelligent, and its citations impressive. Yet at the same time, they may smell something fishy and ask the same question many other professionals have asked,



“What if this is written by ChatGPT?” (Dwivedi, et al., 2023). Or they may realize, only too late, that they “have been ChatGPT’d” (Toncelli & Kostka, 2024, p. 78). Consequently, EFL writing teachers and students alike need to have clear guidelines for Generative AI (GAI) usage.

To address this issue, educational institutions and publishers were among the first to provide guidelines for the (dis)use of GAI. Harvard University (n.d.) has prescribed five basic rules for its faculty and students, including “review your AI-generated content before publishing.” European Commissions (2024) has issued its guidelines to emphasize key issues such as “respect” and “accountability” for researchers. *System*, a SCOPUS-indexed journal published by Elsevier, and other international journals, have adopted a policy for its authors to declare if they have used GAI and restrict its use only to “improve readability and language.”

While top-down guidelines are essential, they often fall short of addressing the nuanced realities and individual experiences of those in academic settings, especially as faculty and students adapt to the pervasive presence and rapid advancements of GAI. This gap in the guidelines fails to capture how EFL writing teachers and students navigate the complex relationship between increased demands for digital literacy and the practical challenges of integrating GAI into the classroom. Moreover, much of the existing discourse tends to overlook the love-hate relationship faced by faculties directly involved in the classroom (Toncelli & Kostka, 2024). As a result, existing GAI guidelines may struggle to resonate with L2 academic writing teachers and students or inspire effective, context-sensitive use.

The present study aims to bridge this critical gap by centering on the experiences of one EFL writing teacher and two international students in an undergraduate academic writing course at a private university in Thailand. By exploring their interactions with ChatGPT, this collaborative poetic autoethnography will delve into what it means to be an academic writer in the GAI age, highlighting both the ethical considerations and practical challenges presented by this technology. The findings shed light on the implications of ChatGPT as more than just a tool, but as a new “ghostwriter” that demands careful navigation in the writing process. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing conversation about GAI’s role in language and literacy education, addressing the gaps in the scholarship of digital applied linguistics.

Literature Review

The Dual Reality of ChatGPT: Potential and Challenges

The release of ChatGPT has stirred both excitement and concerns among language professionals (Kohnke et al., 2023; Yan, 2023). Kohnke et al. (2023) highlighted the dual nature of ChatGPT’s impact on language learning, pointing out both its potential advantages and inherent challenges. They stressed the necessity for teachers and students to embrace ethical and effective practices when incorporating this chatbot into language instruction. As educators begin to integrate generative AI into their teaching, many express mixed feelings about its use. Alm and Ohashi (2024) surveyed the initial reactions of 367 language educators across 48 countries, revealing that 90% of participants were aware of ChatGPT shortly after its launch. While there was a keen interest in leveraging AI to enhance teaching efficiency, concerns regarding issues such as academic integrity also emerged. The perspectives on using ChatGPT in education were varied, encompassing both positive and negative viewpoints. Al-Khresheh (2024) found that English language instructors from 39 countries acknowledged the opportunities presented by ChatGPT for enhancing teaching methods, offering personalized learning experiences, and providing immediate feedback. However, they also expressed apprehensions about challenges, such as the chatbot’s inability to grasp cultural nuances and the inaccuracy of some of its outputs. Similarly, Hao et al. (2024) propose to integrate AI with critical thinking to capitalize on AI’s potential to enhance English education in their Chinese university while

recognizing ethical pitfalls and the risk of worsening existing inequalities. Therefore, any pedagogical use of ChatGPT will need to wrestle with this dual reality.

EFL writing teachers should also heed professionals’ cautions that providing guidelines on ChatGPT alone may be insufficient to guard against its unethical use. On the one hand, interviews with reviewers showed that they had difficulties in identifying ChatGPT-generated papers due to these manuscripts’ close resemblance to human discourse (Teng, 2023). On the other hand, volunteering their service, reviewers do not have needed tools nor time to detect such writing either (Hu, 2024) as ChatGPT-generated writing can easily pass plagiarism check. If such a crack is left in peer-reviewed publishing process, greater is the crack in closed writing processes typical in L2 writing classrooms, where the teacher might be the most competent and the only reader of multiple students’ essays. Understanding these dynamics can help educators navigate the complexities of incorporating AI into L2 writing education effectively.

Furthermore, EFL writing teachers and students need to develop a critical view of existing instrumental discourses on ChatGPT. Mahapatra (2024), for instance, has regarded ChatGPT as a “tool” for diagnostic and feedback purposes. Others have argued that ChatGPT is not to be avoided but utilized, again emphasizing its function as a tool (Alberth, 2023). This perspective is echoed by other advocates, who often compare ChatGPT to other tools and technologies such as “the internet, online study tools, and Wikipedia” (cf., Imran & Almushrraf, 2023, p. 3) to justify the need to integrate this emerging technology in education. Munger’s (2024) position is clearly expressed in his blog article: “ChatGPT Is a Calculator; Deal with It.” Similarly, Kohnke et al. (2023, p. 11) concluded in their article, “ChatGPT is a versatile and valuable *tool* with significant potential to promote engaging and adaptive language learning” (italics added). Thus, a ChatGPT-as-a-tool view prevails in both public and professional consciousness. In one way or another, advocates suggest that ChatGPT is the *tool* to move us forward.

ChatGPT and L2 Writing

As in language education, the unique capacity of ChatGPT to generate text has sparked both enthusiasm and concern within L2 writing research (Strobl et al., 2024; Yan, 2023; Zadorozhnyy & Lai, 2024). Mahapatra (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study that demonstrated notable improvements in ESL students’ academic writing through ChatGPT integration, with pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test results showing significant, sustained gains in language accuracy and coherence. Similarly, Zou and Huang (2024) reported that L2 doctoral students found ChatGPT valuable in enhancing their writing process, particularly for structuring and refining arguments. ChatGPT can also be effectively integrated in L2 academic writing process to help with proofreading, brainstorming, and translation (Wang, 2024). However, Yan’s (2023) qualitative study with Chinese university students in a week-long L2 writing practicum revealed mixed reactions: students appreciated ChatGPT’s efficiency in generating grammatically correct text but expressed concerns over the potential for academic dishonesty, as AI-generated content is challenging to detect as plagiarism. Another survey study, focusing on views of 162 university and graduate students, shows a similar concern about ethics (Das & J. V., 2024). Collectively, these findings highlight the potential of ChatGPT to aid L2 writing development while underscoring the need for strategies to address ethical concerns and promote responsible use in academic contexts.

Recent research on ChatGPT’s role in L2 writing instruction demonstrates its potential as a supportive tool for teachers and learners alike. Mizumoto and Eguchi (2023) assessed ChatGPT’s effectiveness in automated essay scoring (AES) across 12,100 essays. They found its evaluations closely aligned with human assessments and proposed focusing on linguistic features such as lexical diversity when using ChatGPT in L2 writing education to enhance

scoring precision. Their work positions ChatGPT as a valuable resource in providing automated feedback in the classroom. Expanding on these findings, Mizumoto et al. (2024) evaluated ChatGPT’s scoring accuracy alongside human raters and Grammarly, showing a stronger correlation with human ratings (0.79) than Grammarly (0.69), reinforcing AI’s potential for accurate feedback on linguistic precision.

Finally, focusing on its roles in L2 writing education, Allen and Mizumoto (2024) analyzed the perspectives of 33 Japanese EFL learners on using ChatGPT for editing and feedback in writing groups, finding that students favored AI-provided feedback for its clarity and cohesion improvements. They also appreciated ChatGPT’s specific prompts and feedback, which mimicked peer review and enhanced their writing process. Similarly, Teng (2024a) conducted a systematic review on ChatGPT’s role in EFL writing, noting both opportunities, such as enhanced feedback and prompts, and challenges, including possible over-reliance on AI and diminished critical thinking. In a follow-up study, Teng (2024b) examined 45 EFL students’ perceptions of ChatGPT as a supportive “companion” during the writing process, observing that AI assistance boosted the students’ writing motivation, self-efficacy, engagement, and collaboration. Interviews partially supported the quantitative findings while suggesting that teachers cannot be replaced by AI. Teng (2024c) further revealed a spectrum of perceptions and experiences among students with varying levels of metacognitive awareness. For instance, analysis of interview data showed behaviors ranging from merely copying ChatGPT’s responses to effectively utilizing the tool for constructive writing feedback. Together, these studies highlight ChatGPT’s potential to significantly enhance L2 writing instruction, while also underscoring the ethical considerations and critical role of teachers in guiding its responsible and effective use.

Overall, EFL writing teachers and students must make informed decisions about ChatGPT usage. On the one hand, ChatGPT can be effectively integrated in L2 academic writing process to help with proofreading, brainstorming, and translation (Wang, 2024). On the other hand, there is a consensus that the integration in classrooms must be managed to ensure its ethical use in second language writers’ academic work (Alberth, 2023; Halaweh, 2023; Imran & Almusharraf, 2023; Zou & Huang, 2024).

Therefore, despite its great potential in L2 writing education, we should be cautious not to embrace ChatGPT too readily. To begin with, there is a lack of longitudinal studies on the processes and impacts of individuals using or interacting with ChatGPT over time (Mabuan, 2024; Mahapatra, 2024; Yan, 2023). Additionally, the dominant metaphor of ChatGPT as a tool, especially that similar to a calculator, prevalent in both scholarly literature and public discussions, is problematic. Unlike calculators, which produce consistent responses to the same input, ChatGPT generates unique responses to identical queries by leveraging large and still growing language models. Furthermore, existing studies on ChatGPT’s use in L2 writing primarily rely on experimental designs that focus on measurable textual qualities such as fluency and accuracy. When qualitative data were involved, if at all, interviews were the dominant method. In contrast, there is a lack of art-based exploration of ChatGPT in authentic L2 classroom settings and its users’ experiences and emotions.

Present Study

Against this backdrop, our study involves a collaborative team consisting of an EFL writing teacher and two international students. Together, we aim to document and reflect on our experiences with ChatGPT (version 3.5) within the context of an academic writing course. Our exploration is driven by a desire to address key questions related to the integration of this AI

tool in language learning and its impact on our writing processes. Through our shared journeys, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of how ChatGPT can enhance or challenge our academic writing practices.

In response to the pressing need to decolonize educational technology (Bon et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2024), we will address these questions through a collaborative poetic autoethnography. This approach allows us to explore and analyze our personal experiences and cultural contexts (Chang, 2008; Hanauer, 2021), providing a rich, reflective account of how ChatGPT influences our academic writing processes and educational experiences. By integrating our voices and perspectives in a poetic format, we aim to uncover deeper insights and contribute to the ongoing dialogue on decolonizing education. We attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What were our respective experiences and challenges while using ChatGPT in academic writing?
2. What ground-level recommendations do we provide for the use of ChatGPT in L2 writing?

Method

Collaborative Poetic Autoethnography

This study features a collaborative poetic autoethnography. More specifically, autoethnography is qualitative research method that applies ethnographic approaches to study the dynamics between self and culture (Chang, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011). Poetic autoethnography, a subset of this method, involves the use of written poetry to explore and represent the experiences of the researcher (Hanauer, 2021). Furthermore, collaboration between the teacher and the students in research and publication answers to the call to engage in applied linguistics research ethically, not to use students only as informants (Egido & De Costa, 2022).

Participants

This collaborative autoethnography involved three participants. Shizhou Yang is an applied linguist, second language writer, writing teacher, and researcher. His current research interests include TESOL, translanguaging, and Global South epistemologies. He was the instructor of Academic writing, which the two co-authors attended.

Yiting Liu comes from China. Her first language is Mandarin. She started learning English in primary school. Studying in an international college in Thailand was her first immersive English class experience. At the time of joining the study, she was a sophomore, majoring in English Communication. Academic writing was a major required course for her. Ting-Chen Wu comes from Taiwan. She studied at Chang Jung Christian University in Taiwan. When joining the study, she was an exchange student at the Thai university for one year. She took two courses, including Academic writing, from the English Communication program.

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

During the course, which spanned fifteen weeks from January to May 2024, the class of three students ($N = 3$) engaged in frequent five-minute freewriting sessions in class about what it means to be an academic writer in the AI age, read and responded to academic articles on ChatGPT, discussed the topic in class, provided peer feedback on each other's drafts, and revised their own writing. Starting from week nine, two of the students (Henceforth Yiting and Ting-Chen) opted to collaborate with the teacher, while the third student chose to continue with

his own project on ChatGPT and voice in academic writing. Data collected include the teacher’s and students’ poems on ChatGPT, reflections, in-class freewriting samples (referred to as FW), draft 1 (referred to as D1, completed in week 3), and final draft (referred to as DF, completed in week 14).

The teacher had written five 50-word poems on ChatGPT prior to teaching the academic writing course. To make the data comparable, the following instructions were given to the collaborating student authors:

Poems: Each student composes five poems to describe their evolving relationship with ChatGPT in different phases such as beginning, middle, and end. Emotions such as doubt, excitement, confusion, enlightenment should be featured, preferably each poem only foregrounding one main emotion related to the poet’s own experience with or observation of others’ use of ChatGPT.

The poems can be written in English or in the writer’s first language. They can also be bilingual, with a translation in English. They can be free style or follow a certain style, including but not limited to *Jueju* (Chinese and Korean), Haiku (Japanese), and 50-word poems. Preferably, each writer only uses one style of poetry consistently.

Participants’ poems were thus treated as the primary data to showcase their own experiences, emotions and perspectives. They were analyzed thematically to foreground four kinds of content, as typically explored in poetic ethnography, that is: basic event details, contextual information, participant’s stance, and social perspective (Hanauer, 2021).

The three authors collaborated through discussion, allotted writing, and data collection. Poems with shared themes were grouped together to foreground the participants’ experiences and related insights. Prose, drawing on data such as freewriting, drafts, and reflections, was then used to contextualize these poems. It was then linked with scholarly literature to provide additional social perspectives. The final draft reflected both shared views and individual opinions, as represented in the following poetic autoethnography.

Results and Discussion

Excitement

A Taste of ChatGPT

You prepared things in Chinese
 You provided literature review and summaries
 You produced lesson notes
 You pampered my academic writing
 At each prompt, you pour out words
 Like an eloquent knowledgeable professor
 Always bowing
 Never complaining
 Ever listening
 Sweet are you ChatGPT
 Like the White Rabbit candy
 In my mouth

The emergence of ChatGPT has been eye-opening for an EFL writing teacher like myself. Through a friend, I (Shizhou) had to reconsider its presence and potential role as a “personal assistant.” As I reflected,

AI, or artificial intelligence, used to be something foreign to me. I thought it was completely foreign and unrelated to my life. It only belongs to the science nerds and engineers, who know about how to design robots, feed information to the robots, and command the robots to do things for them. But my world was shattered when one day a friend of mine told me that he used ChatGPT to do sermon translations. I seriously doubted the ability AI can handle human languages, especially difficult languages such as Chinese. He was not bothered. He simply turned on his computer and showed me the translation and a poem produced by ChatGPT. My mind was blown away.

I found the translation a good draft. It’s not perfect, but definitely usable as a draft for revision and editing. I found the poem filled with imagery and rhymes, fitting for the theme suggested in the prompt. All of a sudden, I found myself being outsmarted by AI. I must learn how to use this technology.

In the weeks that followed, I began a journey of experimenting with ChatGPT. I used it to do translations from English into Chinese. I used it to draft literature reviews. I used it to provide a summary of certain scholars’ academic works. I also used it to plan out vacation activities. I was trying to live my life in a way like treating AI as my “personal assistant” as my friend said. (FW, 01/28/2024)

Through my experiments, I had “a taste of ChatGPT,” including several attempts with academic writing such as composing “literature reviews and summaries.” I was impressed by ChatGPT for its ability to “pour out words/like an eloquent knowledgeable professor” and to do so politely, “always bowing, never complaining.” Overall, my initial experiments left me a “sweet” aftertaste, like the “White Rabbit candy” that I grew up eating. For the first time in my life, I did not have to type out my translation word by word.

As shown in the following poems, Yiting and Ting-Chen also had a positive first experience with ChatGPT.

Getting to Know ChatGPT

Beginning with curiosity,
I sent “hi” to ChatGPT,
It replied so quickly,
Chat, translate, modify grammar—
For it, everything is easy.

Reflection:

I (Yiting) saw people posting screenshots of chatting with AI, so I tried chatting with ChatGPT too. AI in my impression at that time was not able to have normal conversations and could only make some simple responses based on some keywords. However, I found that ChatGPT was smarter than any AI I had ever seen. It was new to me.

First Love

First time I heard of you
How awesome you are
You have the smartest mind
You can help us solve problems
How many people’s love you carry!

Reflection:

Previously, I (Ting-Chen) thought I didn’t need to use a tool like ChatGPT in my life, but I found that I really needed this tool when communicating with people from different countries. I write these words because they were the views told to me by my friends. The first time I came into contact with ChatGPT, it was actually when I came to Thailand to study and came across this convenient tool. In the eyes of my friends, it is an extremely smart, extremely helpful, powerful and indispensable tool. For me, I have never used such a powerful tool, but I will also be curious to see if it is as powerful as my friends said.

As the poems and reflections above show, all three authors were influenced by social others such as friends to start experimenting with ChatGPT. Amazed by its capacity to “chat” and even draft literature review, they developed a positive position toward ChatGPT. Ting-Chen’s poem *First Love* suggests the strong emotional response ChatGPT has generated. Its last line “How many people’s love you carry!” and related reflection further reveal a positive social attitude toward ChatGPT as “a versatile and valuable tool” (Kohnke et al., 2023, p. 11). As Ting-Chen wrote: “In the eyes of my friends, it is an extremely smart, extremely helpful, powerful and indispensable tool.” The instrumental role played by ChatGPT was evident in our immediate, as well as extended, communities. It corroborates findings from a questionnaire study that the majority of the early users of ChatGPT were positively impressed by its practical features, such as its ability to help solve difficult problems or provide relevant information instantly (Skjuve et al., 2023). Interacting with ChatGPT was exiting, and yet the journey had just begun.

Tension**Alert**

“You liar!”

I cried in my heart.

You misused my name.

You twisted others’ words.

You fabricated scholarly sources.

You lied to me,

Again and again.

Like a wolf in sheep skin

Words in quotation marks

Await behind the dense bushes of literature

To devour

Innocent inquirers of the safari

One day, I (Shizhou) decided to test ChatGPT. I wanted to know whether ChatGPT could truthfully represent others’ work in academic writing. The result was alarming. I wrote: “Provide a review of literature on [my] publications on writing education.”

ChatGPT responded:

XXX has published several articles and books on writing education, particularly in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) and multilingual writing. XXX’s work has contributed significantly to the field of writing education, particularly in its focus on incorporating the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students in writing instruction.

*One of XXX’s notable publications is the book “Bridging Translingual Divides: An Ethnographic Approach to Teaching and Learning Writing in a Multilingual Context” (2017). The book explores the challenges faced by multilingual writers and provides practical strategies for teachers to support these writers in their writing development. XXX’s approach emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing the linguistic diversity of students, and of developing writing pedagogies that are sensitive to this diversity.

In addition to the book, XXX has also published several articles on writing education. For example, in “Resisting the Monolingual Tendency in the Teaching of Writing” (2016)...

Another notable article by XXX is “Integrating Contrastive Rhetoric into the Teaching of L2 Writing: A Theoretical Framework and Pedagogical Suggestions” (2018)...

Overall, XXX’s work in writing education provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by multilingual writers and the ways in which writing instruction can be adapted to meet their needs. XXX’s work emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing the linguistic and cultural diversity of students, and of developing pedagogies that are sensitive to this diversity. XXX’s contributions to the field of writing education are likely to continue to inform and shape writing instruction for multilingual writers in the future.

References:

XXX. (2016). Resisting the monolingual tendency in the teaching of writing. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 15(2), 215–233.

XXX. (2017). *Bridging translingual divides: An ethnographic approach to teaching and learning writing in a multilingual context*. Routledge.

XXX. (2018). Integrating contrastive rhetoric into the teaching of L2 writing: A theoretical framework and pedagogical suggestions. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 42, 23–35.

Despite the flattering words, I knew that I never wrote any of the impressive works mentioned, which were either published in SCOPUS-indexed journals like the *Journal of Second Language Writing* and *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, or by a top publisher like Routledge. In fact, I could not even find any of these works online by searching the titles in quotation marks (see Figure 1)

Nor could I find any of the articles by visiting the journal’s table of contents.

I wrote again, this time providing the reference of my own book:

“Cannot find these references. The right references are something like Yang (2013).”

ChatGPT responded to my query politely, as it had always done. It first apologized to me and then went on to integrate my suggested work. There was some improvement, but the following paragraphs when new examples were given, the same type of error continued:

My apologies for the error in my previous response. Here is a review of literature on XXX’s publications on writing education, based on the corrected reference you provided:

XXX has published several works on writing education, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and second language writing.

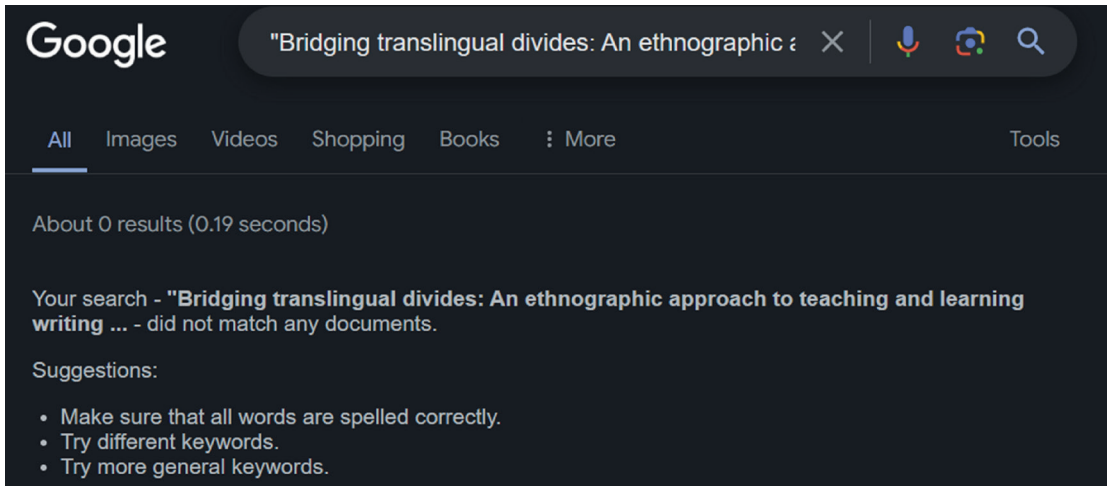


Figure 1 Google search of a book title.

One of his notable publications is the book “...” (2013), which explores the use of autobiographical writing in EFL classrooms to enhance students’ language learning and develop their identities as writers. XXX’s work highlights the potential of autobiographical writing as a means of fostering students’ engagement with writing and facilitating their development as writers.

In addition to the book, XXX has also published several articles on writing education. For example, in “Exploring the Relationship between Reflective Writing and Multimodal Composing in a Second Language Context” (2015)...

Another notable article by XXX is “Translingual Writing as a Pedagogical Idea: Exploring Its Possibilities in EFL Writing” (2017)....

Overall, XXX’s work in writing education highlights the potential of innovative pedagogical approaches that engage students in reflective and creative writing, and that recognize and value their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. XXX’s contributions to the field of writing education are likely to continue to inform and shape writing instruction for EFL and second language writers in the future.

References:

XXX. (2013). *Autobiographical writing and identity in EFL education*. Routledge.

XXX. (2015). Exploring the relationship between reflective writing and multimodal composing in a second language context. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 30, 2–39.

XXX. (2017). Translingual writing as a pedagogical idea: Exploring its possibilities in EFL writing. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 29, 6–77.

ChatGPT’s responses seem to go by a rule of three. For every point in literature review, it provides three examples. That’s not too bad. However, I was still disturbed by both interactions. On the one hand, ChatGPT has successfully constructed an academic writer identity by including the following discursive features in its output:

- Developing each paragraph with a topic sentence and supporting sentences;
- Using proper transitions to link paragraphs;
- Using in-text citations to signal the source of an idea;
- Using prestigious journals such as *Journal of Second Language Writing*;
- Providing both in-text citations and corresponding references more or less in accordance with the APA (7th) style.

These are basic rules for academic writing that I practice and teach my students to follow. In conforming to these rules, ChatGPT works like a charm. On the other hand, ChatGPT has either fabricated or misattributed publications, which I have indicated with an * in the above two examples. Perhaps, it operates under a super-sensitive plagiarism-avoiding parameter, which even forbids the repetition of article titles. Consequently, ChatGPT simply scrambles words from different sources to generate nonexistent yet academic-sounding article or book titles. That’s why a Google search of these titles in quotation marks yields no result. By doing so, however, it can lead the “innocent inquirers”—writers who do not read the actual publications for whatever reason—to commit plagiarism by misattributing sources or attributing quoted words or ideas to conjured sources. Thus, in my eyes now, ChatGPT has turned into a liar. It lies about my work. It lies about publications that do not actually exist. Because of this, there remains an ethical issue and tension that both teachers and students alike need to consider, as expressed by other scholars (Dwivedi et al., 2023), and as reflected in the following poems by Yiting and Ting-Chen.

Controversy

Should we use it or not?
 To what extent?
 With what attitude?
 How to judge it?
 What is your choice?
 These are the questions.

Reflection:

My classmates and I (Yiting) discussed whether we should use ChatGPT to write assignments. I think it is deceiving to teachers, and it is not beneficial to us students. However, one of my classmates said it was just a tool like any other tool, and he was just using a tool. He said my thinking was too old-fashioned, and I thought he was being sophisticated. If it were not a group assignment, we would not have argued about this. After all, I am not interested in how he completed his own assignment, whether he cheated, or whether he learned anything while doing the assignment. He also did not care what my opinions were, and whether I would later use ChatGPT to write my assignment, but when we had to do a group assignment, we must face controversy.

Desire

You always make us dependent
 But you make us lazy
 Make us gradually forget the purpose of learning
 Your cleverness highlights my stupidity
 Makes me feel inferior and disappointed
 How successful you are
 What a failure I am

Reflection:

Why should I (Ting-Chen) write this poem? I want to praise how smart ChatGPT is. It can produce some information we need in a short period of time, or its superb technology can make people admire it and rely on it. But behind these praises, students also lose a lot.

As Ting-Chen continued in her reflection, teachers are increasingly concerned that students may use ChatGPT to complete their written assignments, as it can produce reports quickly without being detected by plagiarism detectors (Halaweh, 2023). This may have a detrimental impact on students’ learning. By using ChatGPT, we can indeed save time and energy to complete writing tasks, but we may not engage in genuine learning by questioning whether the answers provided by ChatGPT are correct. We may just blindly believe that this is a great technology and that it is completely error-free. Just like the sentence I quoted, teachers are actually worried that students will lose the “purpose of learning” in school if they use ChatGPT excessively.

Moreover, the answers given by ChatGPT may not be 100% accurate. This requires us to be cautious when using ChatGPT to summarize others’ work. When we read an article, the thoughts that come to our mind may or may not be the same as what the author wanted to. However, when we chose to use ChatGPT as a summarizing tool, we were left to find out whether the answer it gave us was the same as intended by the author himself or herself. Therefore, although ChatGPT brings us convenience in academic writing, we should be wary of relying on reviews and summaries produced by ChatGPT.

The poems and reflections above highlight a healthy tension with the dual reality of ChatGPT (Alm & Ohashi, 2024). As we continued exploring ChatGPT together, the student authors began to ask critical questions such as “Should we use it or not? To what extent?” These were not just personal questions either. They surfaced in debating with classmates concerning the (il) legitimacy of using ChatGPT to “write assignments.” There was also a sign of taking a personal stance to “face controversy” or disagreements when completing group projects. Additionally, like the teacher, the student authors began demonstrate a critical awareness of inaccuracies in ChatGPT output (Mahama et al., 2023), the risk of overreliance on ChatGPT (Ali, 2023), and the danger of non-learning behaviors such as copying ChatGPT-generated responses directly as one’s own (Teng, 2024c). Through classroom-supported explorations, these student authors were showing signs of becoming “thoughtful, independent thinkers in an AI-driven world” (Hao et al., 2024). To augment this benefit, EFL writing teachers should design writing processes in such ways as to encourage students to reflect on and critique ChatGPT-generated texts and content (Teng, 2024a; Yan, 2023). They should also open up pedagogical spaces to explore ChatGPT’s limitations, defects, and biases (Grassini, 2023). By doing so, they may deepen their students’ digital literacy to outsmart ChatGPT and use it only ethically, “with care and creativity” (Sabzalieva & Valentini, 2023, p. 13).

Triumphs**Amplifying**

“Can we use ChatGPT in academic writing?”

Asked my student from Canada.

I mumbled,

“I want your own thoughts,
 Not ideas spewed out
 By a machine.”
 Silence—
 I heard from him.
 Confusion—
 I heard in the many Asian eyes of the class.
 ...
 Then I added an option:
 “Critique ChatGPT.”

This poem was written based on my (Shizhou’s) interactions with a previous cohort of international students in 2023. Through the poem, I wanted to foreground a shared challenge, and possibly opportunity, faced by EFL writing teachers. Students today are exposed to a wide range of advanced technologies early. It is neither impossible, nor productive, to forbid their use of ChatGPT. Therefore, when my Canadian student asked the question, “Can we use ChatGPT in academic writing?” I had to come up with a reasonable response. My first response was perhaps discouraging to the student. “I want your own thoughts/Not ideas spewed out/By a machine.” He was silent. But maybe, he was just thinking. In contrast, my students from China (1), Indonesia (5), Myanmar (1) looked confused. They probably had not yet tried ChatGPT themselves. After all, digital divide continued even in universities (Santiago-Ruiz, 2023). Eventually, during the discussion with my students, I decided in that class to add another option for the term paper: At the end of the semester, the students could alternatively write an article to “critique ChatGPT.” Later, this Canadian student finished an essay documenting and analyzing his own use of ChatGPT for different purposes such as solving math problems and making lesson plans. Reading this student’s essay, I was encouraged to continue exploring this topic with my new academic writing students.

I see this way of engaging with new technology as an extension of my critical pedagogy. In the past decade, I have explored EFL writing education not to reproduce template-based formulaic content and language, but rather, something that is experience-based, meaningful, creative, and reflective (Yang, 2013, 2022, 2023b). Critical pedagogy foregrounds the learners as both critical readers (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and critical writers, whose writing is meant to transform the world (Freire, 2000). Even technologies should be critically examined to reveal and defy the dehumanizing, and often monolingual, ideologies they reproduce (Yang, 2023a). I am glad that the Canadian student eventually submitted his article based on his experience of using ChatGPT and reading scholarly literature on ChatGPT. In his article, he concluded by encouraging educators and learners alike to develop critical understandings about ChatGPT:

On the other hand, caution must be taken on the part of the teachers and students to use this technological advancement ethically. Educators should guide their students, working together, to establish an ethical framework from which they can use this tool properly. Students should also be educated on the weaknesses of ChatGPT and made aware of what the system can do well and what it cannot do. Knowing the benefits and disadvantages of using ChatGPT in the university writing classroom can give us the knowledge we need in moving forward in education with this new technology.

I take these words as a call of the time. As an EFL writing educator, I need to learn about this technology, use it, critique it myself, and guide my students to use it “ethically” and “properly.” For this to happen, I must carefully consider my pedagogical design to integrate ChatGPT as a relevant topic, part of the educational resources, and a potential participant (An et al., 2023). I also must involve my students in rethinking about and resisting the temptation of ChatGPT to complete their assignments quickly. As my Canadian student reflected later:

Initially, I would have considered any use of ChatGPT for schoolwork to be wrong, but I think through my own research, and input from teachers like yourself, I came to see that there may be some ways to use it that may be helpful and wouldn’t constitute cheating.

We are in the business of reforming our minds.

Temptation

A few minutes left before the deadline,
I can’t finish it, the dwindling time is a sign.
“With the help of ChatGPT, is the work still mine?”
“Just do it, you don’t have time!”
I followed the voice in my mind.

Reflection:

Once, I (Yiting) used ChatGPT to finish my assignment. It was not as smart as I thought, I have to say. But I made this choice myself. No matter how many mistakes it made in my assignment, I reaped what I sowed. Before I used it to finish my assignment, I always thought ChatGPT could output perfect work, so I thought the assignment it did would be much higher than my own level. The assignment was some multiple-choice questions that determine the type of translation a word in a sentence. However, it seems that ChatGPT was unable to distinguish them; it just randomly selected answers and filled them in. At hindsight, I’m glad it did not do a good job, so it is no longer a temptation for me to rely on ChatGPT. I realized that ChatGPT cannot always write something better than me like I had thought.

Confession

Why use ChatGPT?
Is it to deal with the teacher?
Is it to complete the homework efficiently?
Or is it to save time and effort?
Or maybe just want to be opportunistic?
Stop making excuses and admit it!
You have all the above thoughts!

Reflection:

I (Ting-Chen) used these words in my poem because I have to be honest. When I had little time to finish my homework, I would use some software to assist me in writing my homework. When I used the software, at those critical moments when the assignment deadline was approaching, I had the thoughts described in my poem. Writing this poem based on my own experience allowed me to

reflect on my learning, face up to it, and change these bad behaviors of procrastinating. I decide to use technologies such as ChatGPT appropriately and remember my purpose of learning. As long as I stay in school, my purpose is to learn, to learn with integrity, not to learn by taking shortcuts.

The teacher-students dynamics documented in this section demonstrates the criticality of social learning regarding the ethical integration of ChatGPT in L2 writing education. More specifically, it shows that simply providing guidelines is insufficient. For guidelines to be effectively implemented, a classroom community of practice is needed so that ChatGPT can provide collaboration and support for L2 writers (Strobl et al., 2024; Teng, 2024b).

Actions Points

Lean Not on ChatGPT

Fancied by my new shower curtain
 I slipped and fell
 Into the soft green elegant curtain
 My body, naked
 My feet up in the air
 My hands
 Struggling to hold onto the bathtub
 Barely did I escape a back-breaking landing
 On the tile floor
 ChatGPT—
 A shower curtain wall.

After I (Shizhou) finished the first draft of this poetic autoethnography, I took a shower in the bathtub where I had just replaced our old plain white shower curtain with a new stylish one. In a slip of mind, I leaned on the new curtain and fell backwards. As I struggled to get myself up, many thoughts rushed through my mind. One of them, connecting with the topic that I was writing about, was “I should not lean on ChatGPT, however fashionable and sophisticated it appears.” “It’s like this new shower curtain,” I said to myself. That’s it. ChatGPT can provide some privacy and the appearance of creative writing, but it is not, as my friend had suggested, “an assistant,” at least, not a reliable assistant at all. I had planned to recommend “Do not rely on ChatGPT” as *one* of the several equally important action points. My shower accident convinced me otherwise. For L2 writing researchers, teachers, and student writers, this should be the starting point, the most important principle in one’s academic career or learning. In other words, we should deliberately marginalize ChatGPT in our lives to avoid individual and collective falls by leaning on its attractive appearance in speed, flow of ideas, or “academic” practices. Alternatively, we may regard ChatGPT as a new scrupulous ghostwriter, who “pours out words” eloquently on every conceivable subject but does not have a moral compass of its own to guide its output. Because of this, it is perhaps even better to humanize ChatGPT by treating it like a human participant, holding it to the standard of ethics, and ask ourselves: “Would I trust such a character in my literacy activities?”

Position learners as emergent scholars. We should not let generative AI take over pedagogically sound practices. In other words, the use of ChatGPT should be guided by principles that are most conducive to the development of savvy users, who are critical of the texts generated. In this regard, writing professionals are encouraged to draw on critical pedagogy to cultivate dialogical agents, who can read the text and its ideologies critically to reveal its biases

(Alm & Watanabe, 2023; Freire, 2000). More closely, writing teachers can also situate ChatGPT and other AI technologies as an additional participant from a classroom writing ecology’s perspective (Yang, 2023a), thus taking into account the dynamic interactions among diverse elements such as policies, processes, and artifacts to unravel the impact of AI on literacy and literate identities systematically.

Prepare learners as knowers. In a time when generative AI technologies permeate, it becomes increasingly important to humanize literacy education. For instance, the teachers can use storytelling, story writing, and hybrid academic writing to allow learners to contribute and grow as epistemological subjects who can question written words and dominant narratives, including texts produced by ChatGPT, by foregrounding their experiences and reflections. This translanguaging design disrupts the usual power dynamics between majority and minority languages to create conditions for the marginalized to speak for themselves (Canagarajah, 2020; Kim & Park, 2020; Yang, 2023b). Otherwise, literacy education driven by AI technologies may continue to marginalize learners, especially those from the multilingual background, to naively allow ChatGPT to write and speak for them when deadlines draw near or disbelief in their own abilities overtakes them.

Weight

Everyone has a steelyard in their heart.
Will ChatGPT be the appropriate weight?
Some people trust, some people doubt.
Over time, the views can be thawed.

Reflection:

At that time some of us [students] thought ChatGPT is a cheating tool. An American student said this in our class. Ting-Chen and I (Yiting) also thought that way, so she refused to use it. She was worried that she would rely on it if she uses it.

But as once I argued with the boy (already graduated), there are also some people [who] believe that ChatGPT is just a tool and people use it like any other tools. He thinks it is 理所当然 (logical or natural) to use it to complete assignment.

So at that time, I felt that everyone had a different 秤 (scale) in their hearts.

When new technologies are developed but the relevant laws are not yet complete, many things can happen. No matter how good the original intention of creating technology is, without restraint it may gradually develop in a bad direction. Conscience alone cannot exert much restraining effect. But it shouldn’t be resisted blindly. Over time, those who resist technology have to accept it.

My Decision

We can use ChatGPT sometimes
But do not rely on it
Don’t be afraid of mistakes
Teachers are not like tigers
Teachers won’t chase us like a prey
Teachers are like a beacon
To illuminate our unknown sea

Explaining this poem, Ting-Chen gave two suggestions in her reflection:

First, we can use ChatGPT, but not every time, not often, but only when we really need it. Do not let yourself depend on it. Humans can no longer rely on humans, so why must we rely on machines? It does not even provide us with sentimental value, but we are still so attached to it. Why is that? Could it be that some kind of psychedelic technique was used to make everyone fall in love with it? I love it so much that I cannot help myself! Remember, the only one we can rely on is ourselves.

Another suggestion is that we do not have to be afraid of writing incorrect grammar or using the wrong words in our articles. We have teachers to correct our mistakes and give us the best solutions, so we just need to write our own ideas boldly and give ourselves the courage to make mistakes. Everyone is born to learn. Learning to make mistakes is also a form of learning. But when you make a mistake, after being corrected by a teacher or elder, you must correct your behavior and strictly improve yourself. In the poem, I compare the teacher to a beacon, while we enter an unknown dark ocean. Let the teacher always be behind us and light our way forward. As long as we move forward bravely, when we look back, we will find that the teacher has always been by our side and protected us.

Evidently, L2 writing classrooms are important sites for wrestling with different social views toward and conflicting ways with ChatGPT. These sites are contact zones for critical consciousness to emerge through struggle (Pratt, 1991). As an EFL writing teacher, I took my stance toward ChatGPT as an unreliable “shower curtain,” Yiting pondered over different (ethical) “称” (scales) which guide individuals’ actions, and Ting-Chen formed her own “decision” that ChatGPT can be used, but not relied upon, to avoid forsaking the “purpose of learning.” These realizations echo the advice of positioning ChatGPT as a supportive “companion” in the teaching and learning of L2 writing, instead of replacing the teachers (Teng, 2024b). For this to happen, careful pedagogical design and implementation that involve critiquing ChatGPT’s words (Alm & Watanabe, 2023) should be promoted in EFL writing education.

Conclusion

In this collaborative poetic autoethnography, we have shown that ChatGPT has penetrated the lives of me, the EFL writing teacher, and the lives of my multilingual students. None of us can escape ChatGPT’s dual impact: the allure of its convenience and the responsibility of ethical use. Through our shared exploration, we deepened our collective understanding of ChatGPT, strengthened our commitment to its ethical application, and refined our critical perspectives on leveraging it effectively in L2 academic writing. We tried to outsmart ChatGPT by bringing it to light through sharing personal experiences, reading about related literature, discussing its pitfalls and possibilities, and engaging in research even as we co-authored this paper. What I learned as an EFL writing teacher through this project is that we should not decolonize academic writing only at the final stage of presentation by diversifying the language use (Canagarajah, 2022). We should also consider how the writing process can be redesigned as a social practice of disrupting, even through a purposeful engagement with ChatGPT, hegemonic power relations between teachers and students, between center-scholarship and peripheral/emergent scholars. Frequent engagement in multi-sided dialogues seems vital. Furthermore, the authorship can be redesigned as well to increase the students’ exposure to and engagement in the very process of creating and negotiating knowledge about the (dis)use of ChatGPT.

Compared to survey studies, our study provided more sophisticated views of ChatGPT. Instead of seeing it only as a tool, like a calculator and computer, or even a more human-like “assistant,” our respective interactions with ChatGPT and reflections taught us that ChatGPT is no simple tool. It is more like a new ghostwriter. The reason is that the Open AI has made it possible for both teachers and students to use ChatGPT to generate texts for their own purposes. However, through experimentation and discussion, we have become increasingly aware of the misinformation provided by ChatGPT at times. We have also come to see the stifling effects of ChatGPT-generated academic texts, which are formulaic and predictable. Our study thus issues a cautionary note on unguided and unprincipled use of ChatGPT in academic writing courses.

This does not mean that we reject ChatGPT completely. On the contrary, we share the belief that there is room to integrate ChatGPT in L2 writing courses (Strobl et al., 2024; Teng, 2024b). However, it should be done in ways to humanize ChatGPT, the new ghostwriter, by applying the same ethical principles that we would apply to human writers. This does not mean asking ChatGPT to do what it is incapable of; it is simply a reminder that ethical considerations should permeate every step of academic writing, including the use of ChatGPT and its related output.

Pedagogically, the use of ChatGPT should be done in interactive ways, involving open and ongoing discussions among the teacher and the students. It should also be interrogative, involving an inquiry-based process of creating new knowledge that is fair, just, and ethical.

We end with our ground-level recommendations by sharing three poems to complement existing top-down guidelines:

Recommendations for Academic Writers

(Shizhou)

Let not ChatGPT be your ghost-
Writer
Seducing you
With her beautiful lies
Haunting you
With her ugly truths
About you and others

Let ChatGPT take
A backseat
Until you have a draft
For ChatGPT to critique
Its language and content
That *your* voice
May rise above the polished words.

Habit (Yiting)

Repeat, repeat, and it will become a habit.
ChatGPT is convenient,
Like you have it in your pocket.
You try it and you will get fascinated.
After getting used to using it,

Your own writing becomes more and more limited.
Walk by yourself;
Do not rely on it.

Use ChatGPT Sparingly

(Ting-Chen)

ChatGPT can be used, but don't rely on it.
Think about the original intention of learning
Don't lose yourself, lose your courage
Face yourself calmly and accept your shortcomings
Every test makes us grow
Don't give up, create your own world
Everyone needs to prove that we can win without relying on ChatGPT.

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