Book Review

Developing writing competence in L2 Chinese classrooms: Research and application (1st edition), edited by Li Yang & Laura Valentín-Rivera

Reviewed by:

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An L2 learner's learning potential in writing has been characterized into two systems by Manchón's (2011) dual approach: Learning-to-write (L2R) and writing-to-learn (W2L). While the L2R approach focuses on teaching L2 learners writing for the sake of being able to express themselves through a written text, the W2L approach focuses on integrating L2 learning tasks that aide language development outside of helping ameliorate the writing of learners (Yang & Valentín-Rivera, 2023). The W2L approach, which has also been supported by the idea that writing enables perpetuity in L2 learning as it allows learners to refer back to works that they have already created at a slower pace, thus allowing writers to also engage in the act of the explicit recall of memories while writing (Williams, 2012), has not thoroughly been explored in the context of the L2 learning of Mandarin Chinese. Thus, with this collection of cutting-edge empirical articles, alongside editor commentary, Yang and Valentín-Rivera acknowledge that there has been an emergence of work in L2 Chinese writing but that further research needs to be conducted to expand upon our current knowledge surrounding, and practices relating to, textuality and that they therefore hope to inform readers about successful strategies that can promote the language learning ability of non-heritage Chinese learners of every level while also providing a jumping point for further research (Yang & Valentín-Rivera, 2023).

The book itself is very affordable digitally with prices ranging from $14.75 on Google Books to $20.87 on Kindle and is even relatively inexpensive in a hardback format with a price of $83.84 through Amazon. The editors themselves, Li Yang and Laura Valentín-Rivera, are both active contributors to the field of L2 learning research and have been interested in the pedagogical practices involved in such learning. Independently, Li Yang is an associate professor of Chinese at Kansas State University. There, she conducts research in Chinese second language acquisition, with a focus on second language writing and interlanguage pragmatics and has published numerous articles and edited volumes in the United States and China (Yang & Valentín-Rivera, 2023, p. viii). Laura Valentín-Rivera is an associate professor of Spanish also at Kansas State University. She has also published various articles regarding the pedagogical and learning practices of L2 learners, primarily with Spanish, and her academic interests include the literacy of heritage language learners, social-tool-mediated collaboration, and applied Spanish linguistics (Yang & Valentín-Rivera, 2023, p. viii). Together, it is apparent that both editors are knowledgeable in their respective fields and can offer deeper insight into L2 learning and pedagogical practices which would be invaluable in an L2 setting; something that can be seen through their commentary within the book, and their selected works.

The 187-page book spanning 8 chapters, begins with a separate section containing the editors' own commentary. Each chapter, thereafter, is a carefully selected empirical article from various researchers, including the editors. The book then ends with concluding statements from the editors. During their commentary, the editors take meticulous care to ensure that no one stance was held above others nor that any relevant perspective was deemed unfit to be explored (Yang & Valentín-Rivera, 2023). In the beginning section, the editors meticulously cover each of the chapters in-depth regarding their purpose, the editors' own views on the strengths and weaknesses of each article, as well as potential avenues of further exploration. Here, Yang & Valentín-Rivera argue that though there have been several emerging studies contributing to how writing and W2L practices in the classroom can be seen as a viable and effective method of learning for L2 Chinese writers, there are a few over-arching issues with the existing body of work, generally (2023, p. 2). Of the existing problems, there are 8 main issues with the current breadth of literature that the editors have chosen to address, and highlight, as a means for a call-to-action through the 8 chapters in this edition. Therefore, each chapter is designed to carefully examine and address one of these 8 major oversights.

The oversights that each chapter aims to address can be summarized as follows. Chapter 1 aims to address the lack of existing comparisons between how Chinese writers of different backgrounds (i.e. Heritage language learners and foreign language learners) perform during the writing process; something that the editors believe could help better equip writers through the identification of strengths and weakness in their respective writing processes. In a similar vein, the editors also highlight the little attention that has been directed towards the extensiveness of writing as a process

especially regarding the specific writing strategies employed by different L2 Chinese learners which affect the quality of the written texts produced (Chapter 3) and the how written corrective feedback is perceived and its level of familiarity which is said by the editors to be crucial to cyclical writing practices (Chapter 7) (Yang & Valentín-Rivera, 2023, p. 2). The remaining five chapters are then included to highlight the limited scope, and contexts, of the existing body of work. Chapters 4 & 5 seek to examine how much prior research on many themes, such as textual cohesion and syntactic development have been generally limited in their scope and, therefore, need more research to determine the true applicability of findings (Yang & Valentín-Rivera, 2023, p. 2). Chapters 2, 6, and 8, though, deal more so with the platforms wherein L2 Chinese writing and learning are increasingly taking place which have not been thoroughly explored, i.e. collaborative writing in online classes, social media, and virtual platforms for teaching (e.g. Zoom) respectively.

However, the selected studies are not without their limitations, something the editors explicitly state. This is something that is especially apparent in some notable limitations such as many of the studies having a limited sample size or not enough depth in their data collection methods. One glaring issue, though, which is especially highlighted by the editors is the limited geographical scope of these studies as there exists a primary focus on studies that are conducted across different regions of the United States. Therefore, the collection of studies are more limited in their scope and generalizability. The one exception to this is the article presented in Chapter 4 which was conducted in China. However, regarding this, there is also the potential concern that immersion might also impact the learning of L2 learners in a way that might potentially advantage them in contrast to other L2 learners (e.g. Lyster, 1987). However, the editors outline that while this may seem to be a much larger issue at first that the given studies "align with the six spheres that are crucial to develop a deep and up-to-date understanding of the complexities of L2 Chinese writing" (Yang & Valentín-Rivera, 2023, p. 4). These six spheres are that the studies: (1) differentiate heritage and foreign language learners, (2) understand the different social drives that underline L2 Chinese learning (collaborative vs. individual), (3) actually think through how the processes used for learning will lead to the desired outcome of learning, (4) assess the actual impact of instruction methods on the efficiency of L2 Chinese writers, (5) assess the impact of peer and instructor feedback on written accuracy, and (6) explore the impact of unexpected shifts of teaching modalities due to Covid-19 on the writing outcomes of students.

Overall, while the collection of articles is very impressive and are cutting-edge in the field, they should be treated as more of a call to action and a jumping point for future research due to the limited nature of the studies themselves. The editors, and the authors of a majority of the articles, agree with this sentiment and are encouragingly straightforward in pointing out how further work needs to be done to address these limitations. Thus, this work serves as a really good starting point for further research with some interesting ideas to implement pedagogically. Further, more widespread

data collection must occur to examine the ultimate generalizability of the presented findings to see if these can be applied across classrooms of varying contexts.

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