



# Writing to Speaking: Using Journal Writing as a Scaffold to Gain Confidence in L2 Speaking

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**Abstract**— In the Philippines, quite a number of educational institutions are still very strict about the English only Policy (EOP). Students, teachers, staff and stakeholders are prescribed to use the English language as a medium of communication, and non-compliance to this would me a violation of the rule. However, students in a community whose first language is not English, poses a resisting behavior towards the use of the language. Researchers have found that a possible explanation to this is the fact that the speakers lack the faculty to use the language. Though many Filipinos have regarded a certain prestige to this language, one cannot discount the fact that using it in a community with different L1 creates an uncomfortable feeling towards students whose language of everyday communication is not English. In order to address this concern, I would like to look into the possibility of utilizing writing as a scaffold for confident oral communication.

**Index Terms**— journal writing, journal, confidence in speaking, L2 speaking.

## 1. Introduction

Speaking and writing are two of the core skills used in the process of communication. Over the years, these two have been used effectively by people to send and receive messages. Both skills are instrumental in the success of the exchange of information initiated by either a speaker or a writer. In practice, speaking is manifested through the use of oral language in activities like conversation, storytelling, talk, speech, etc. Writing, on the other hand, is manifested through written language in activities like journal writing, essay writing, news writing, etc.

Studies have looked into how these two are intertwined. Despite claims that one between these two comes first before the other, there is no doubt about the key roles that they play in the process of communication. Kanton and Rubin (1981) have mentioned that “oral language is closely related to written language.” As some experts believe, written expression is simply speech" written down. This notion is a proof of the relationship that exists between these two.

Schafer (1981) regards speaking and writing as “multi-dimensional processes”. Hence, whether these modes are regarded as fundamentally the same or not, depends on the dimension one opts to focus on. However, in the process of learning a language, it has been widely considered that speaking comes first before writing. In a sense, before one is able to master writing as a skill, speaking naturally comes first. Kaye

and Matson (2000) noted that much is required in learning a second or foreign language. They added that in this process, one has to practice using the language, through speaking, before mastery is achieved. This claim may be attributed to the notion that the more the person speaks the language, the better speaker they become. However, in a country like the Philippines where English is more attributed to the privileged and the educated, using the language has always been a challenge to many. While others have rich access and exposure to the English language, a considerable number have less, if completely no, access to it. Despite this fact, many educational institutions aim at producing students who are capable and fluent in using the English language, as they believe that having the skill will contribute greatly for students to be globally competitive in the future. To achieve this goal, some educational institutions adapted the English-only policy which enforces students to use the English language most, if not all the time. This has obviously garnered various reactions from students, parents and teachers alike, but some administrators remained strong about this policy because they believe that such a rule will have long-term benefits to the learners. With the thrust to produce students who are global-competitive a number of school administrators around the country require adherence to the English-only policy, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Since the EOP has become an established rule in some schools in the Philippines, students, teachers, staff and stakeholders are prescribed to use the English language as a medium of communication, and non-compliance with this policy would be a violation of the rule. However, it is not surprising that students in a community whose first language is not English, exhibit a resisting behavior towards the use of the language. Researchers have found that a possible explanation for this is that speakers lack the ability to use the language, and for others, confidence is a big question. Though many Filipinos have regarded this language with prestige, one cannot discount the fact that using it in a community with people speaking different L1 creates an uncomfortable feeling towards students whose language of everyday communication is not English.

This situation has remained a challenge for a majority of the students in the country, since the school is the only avenue for them to practice using the language. This means that, aside from the school, they cannot practice using the English language at home or anywhere else, probably because the people outside the

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school do not actually use it. Since this is the case, developing capability and fluency in using the language is a widely accepted challenge for them.

Contrary to the belief of school administrators that the more speakers use the English language, the better speaker they will become, Kaye and Matson (2000) argued that not all people who utilize speaking more, successfully deliver the message that they intend to communicate. They attributed this claim to the fact that sometimes, the quality of the message in a communication situation is overlooked, while quantity is what seems to be prioritized more, since the focus is on the use of language and not so much on the content. Furthermore, they noted that most of us who have learned an L2, often use a strategy which we are aware to be using unconsciously, to aid our difficulty in expressing our thoughts and ideas by using the closest approximation to it that will allow us to maintain the course of our speech. This move by speakers is what they consider as sacrificing the message. This is also possible when we make compromises by simplifying the intended message that we aim to deliver, as though it was what we really want to say.

In the same study, they proposed that in order to address the “compromises” in the process, “quality communication” must be recognized. However, the concern on the lack of faculty in using the language in speaking, alongside resistance towards the policies are concerns that need to be addressed. In their study, Kaye and Matson (2000) found out that writing could play a determining role in the advanced student’s progress toward learning quality conversation. Due to this finding, this study looks into how writing can serve as a scaffold in L2 oral communication. It is significant because not much study on this topic has been conducted. Furthermore, it can be significant to teachers, students and school administrators of schools that still embrace the EOP, as it aims to aid the resisting attitude of students towards using English in schools, especially outside of the English class.

The study was conducted in a Formation House in Lipa City, Batangas Philippines. The institution is an exclusive school for boys being formed for priesthood. As part of the preparation for their chosen path, students are bound by rules that they have to uphold and follow. Furthermore, during the formation years, the said students are evaluated according to the five areas of formation: human formation, spiritual formation, academic formation, community living and pastoral formation. Those who fail in some of these areas are unfortunately sent out and advised to take a break from the formation, or better yet, leave. One of the common reasons for a student to be sent out of the formation house is failure to comply with the rules. That is why, when the institution adopted the English-only policy, the students exhibited resistance because they feared that it may cause them trouble.

The participants of this study were five junior students ages 14 and 15. They are not of legal age, thus, parental consent was sought. The request fully explained the intention and the nature of the research. It also explained the type of information needed and how the participants were chosen, and the details that are pertinent to their participation in the study. Furthermore, the

participation in the study remained voluntary. Data was also treated with utmost confidentiality; participants were also assigned codes to hide their identities.

The study looked into the practice-writing journal of the participants. Their journals were checked according to content (whether or not they write about their personal experiences, or reflections or stories), corrections, and comments. After the journals were checked, the researcher interviewed the participants regarding their perception about the EOP, their difficulties, the benefits they get from it, and finally how they think the practice journal writing helps them in relation to developing confidence in using English in everyday communication.

The starting point of this study goes back to the practice of writing journals of the chosen participants. It is noteworthy that all the five of them utilized their journals as an avenue for them to share their everyday experiences, reflections and thoughts. These journals are submitted once every week for the English teacher to monitor their progress in writing. Students are free to write anything that they are willing to share in their journals. The teacher checks the journals for organization, sentence structure and grammar, however entries in the journals are not graded and have no bearing on the students’ performance and grade in the subject. From this starting point, the respondents were interviewed, and the findings of the study were analyzed.

All five participants use Filipino as their L1; it is the language they grew up using, and the language that their families speak. Filipino is also the language that they used when they first started attending school. However, when they entered the formation house, they had to submit themselves to the formation, which means that they had to follow the rules. Hence, they have to follow the EOP.

Coming from diverse backgrounds, the students made big adjustments when they came to the formation house, especially with the rules concerning academics and discipline. Based on records, the students in this formation house came from both private and public schools, and incurred different levels of academic performance when they were in grade school. Although most of them reacted negatively about the EOP, they later made adjustments and exerted effort in adhering to it, since not following would result in violations and sanctions.

On the contrary, the students claimed that they can talk in English, however, they are not confident about it because they are not used to speaking the language outside of the formation house, or even when they are left with their brothers and no monitors are around to check them. Despite these facts, the students think that speaking in English can help them in the future, that is why they try to use the language. They also shared that as high school students who are being formed to be priests in the future, they know that speaking in English will help them a lot. They see English as a tool for them to be able to fulfill a part of their task in the future, which explains why as they continue their studies in the formation house, they become willing to try speaking in English even if they are not confident about it.

When asked about their reaction towards the English rule, the students admitted that they were surprised that the rule exists,

because it is the first time that they heard about it. One of the participants reported that he was not comfortable with it. He even added: *"We don't speak in English at home...we are not rich, so my parents only speak Tagalog"*. Others admitted that in the beginning of their stay in the formation house, they did not take the EOP seriously, but with the sanctions given, and seeing that other students are trying to follow it, they realized the need to exert effort in following the rule. One of the five also reported that *"Speaking in English is very hard for the other students. I think it hinders them from saying what they want to say because they cannot find the right words to explain what they are thinking of"*. The same person added that he thinks that the EOP should be removed. When they were asked why they seem not to be "pro-EOP", they said that it is not easy to speak in English because they are not sure if they make sense about what they say or the words they use when they start talking in English. One of the participants reported *"I don't want people to laugh at me if I commit mistakes. I know other people will make fun of me if I use the wrong words or my sentences do not make sense"*.

Furthermore, they agreed with each other that the EOP is a big challenge for them because they are not confident with what they are saying. They feel embarrassed when they run out of words. They are also shy because speaking in English does not seem "normal" to them. By normal, they mean that they are not used to it; it is not common to them. They also claimed that they only use the words they know, and because of that, sometimes they are not able to express themselves clearly. One of them even shared that sometimes, he translates the words directly, which makes it hard for the others to understand what he is trying to say. However, one informant noted that *"This is a rule, we have to follow this, so even if it's hard to speak in English, I have to speak it. I don't want to be reported for a violation"*. Similarly, one claimed that he doesn't know all the words in English, but he still tries to speak the language because he feels threatened by the demerit that may be given if he will not follow the EOP.

Despite the negative reactions that they have toward speaking the language, they still find benefits from adhering to the EOP. One reported that *"If you get used to it, it will become a habit, and if people outside the seminary hear you speaking in English, they will be amazed"*.

Another informant added that *"If you speak in English and you become good at it, you develop a "dignity" as a seminarian. The people will be impressed that seminarians speak in English, so I think the EOP still has a good effect on us"*. In this manner, "dignity" refers to the image that seminarians are able to create by speaking in English. Another student also added that English is the most common language, so if you know how to speak it, you can communicate with other people who speak the same language.

Based on the narratives, resistance toward the EOP is prompted by their lack of faculty to produce the language. At first, they would not take the EOP seriously because they do not want to be laughed at, in case they commit mistakes in speaking the English language. On the contrary, it is good to note that as they stay longer in the seminary, they become willing to exert

effort in speaking in English, hence, their concern remains to be the fact that they are not confident using the language because they have not mastered the skill, and their vocabulary is limited. To address this concern and be comfortable in speaking in English, the students proposed that they should learn correct grammar, develop vocabulary or read books. One seminarian added that *"Here in the seminary, we are asked to write journals. I think it can be useful if we practice (our skill) in English through the journal, since the teacher reads it and gives corrections on grammar and sentence structure. In the journal, we can express ourselves freely, so I think it helps us to be more comfortable and confident speaking in English"*.

When they were asked if the rest agreed with one of the respondents about how writing may help them be comfortable in speaking the TL, the students claimed that they can express themselves freely and without hesitation, since they know that whatever is written in the journal is kept between them and their teacher. They also noted that since there are corrections in grammar and sentence structure, they have a chance to review their failures (mistakes); they can correct themselves, so in the future, they know how to use it properly. It was also reported that *"When I am writing, I don't feel embarrassed that someone is going to wait until I finish what I want to say, because when I am talking to someone (in English), sometimes, I stop because I don't know what to say, but when I am writing, I can take my time and finish what I want to say without being in a hurry or pausing"*. Moreover, it was added that *"(I think that) writing is the best avenue for me to develop my grammar and vocabulary, so when I use it in the future, like when I speak, I can use it clearly and correctly"*.

Furthermore, they claimed that writing in the journal can help them be more confident in expressing their ideas. They take note of the corrections given to them, thus helping them to develop not just in writing, but in speaking as well. Similarly, they claimed that journal writing helps them to be more confident because they apply the corrections even when they are speaking, so they feel that they become better when talking in English. One of the students reported that *"Sometimes, I use my journal entries during vocation campaigns, or when I am asked to share my experiences to other altar servers in our parish church during recollections and other activities, and because my journal was already checked and corrected, I feel more confident when I talk"*.

Kaye and Matson's (2000) argument that in speaking, the quality of message is sacrificed due to compromises that speakers make, relates to the concerns raised by the students in this study. They recognized the fact that since they are not equipped with the faculty to use the English language effectively in communicating with other people orally, they have a tendency to simply make use of the words that they know. Their lack of vocabulary and difficulty in organizing their thoughts and constructing correct sentences hinder them from communicating their ideas clearly. These reasons lead them to find other ways to develop their skill in using the language, and this is where journal writing comes in. As for Kaye and Matson (2000), writing temporarily freezes the transmission of the message, thus allowing the person to

construct the message before it is delivered or shared. In this manner, the writer has more chance of refining the message he/she aims to transmit by choosing the right words and organizing sentences properly.

This study found that by utilizing their journals in class, the students can freely develop their ideas. It allows them to prepare themselves for what they want to say. In the same manner, the corrections given in their journals serve as a guide; it allows them to take note of the areas where they committed errors, thus getting used to it and applying it even in their speaking. Because of these, the informants claimed that they develop confidence in speaking in English, and that their journals are helpful tools for them to achieve such confidence.

## 2. The Study

The study was conducted in a Formation House in Lipa City, Batangas Philippines. The institution is an exclusive school for boys being formed for priesthood. As part of the preparation for their chosen path, students are bound by rules that they have to uphold and follow. Furthermore, during the formation years, the said students are evaluated according to the five areas of formation: human formation, spiritual formation, academic formation, community living and pastoral formation. Those who fail in some of these areas are unfortunately sent out and advised to take a break from the formation, or better yet, leave. One of the common reasons for a student to be sent out of the formation house is failure to comply with the rules. That is why, when the institution adopted the English-only policy, the students exhibited resistance because they feared that it may cause them trouble.

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## 3. Discussion

Coming from diverse backgrounds, the students made big adjustments when they came to the formation house, especially with the rules concerning academics and discipline. Based on records, the students in this formation house came from both private and public schools, and incurred different levels of academic performance when they were in grade school. Although most of them reacted negatively about the EOP, they later made adjustments and exerted effort in adhering to it, since not following would result in violations and sanctions.

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#### 4. Conclusion

The emergence of EOP in education has been a big challenge to Filipino students since English is not our L1. It is widely known that not all of us have access to the language, which most Filipinos attribute to the rich and able. Over the years, English



has kept a certain level of prestige attached to it, that people who are not fully equipped with the knowledge of it and its use regard themselves as inefficient and unable, that is why they do not have the confidence to use the language.

Admittedly, the participants in this study claimed that they lack the ability to express themselves in English, that is why their confidence remains low. This also leads to the negative views about the EOP, thus resulting to resistance in adhering to the rule. The students reported that whenever they are confronted with speaking situations, they make compromises by using the words that they know, to express themselves. It is good to note that their willingness to exert effort in using English when speaking is prompted by their goal of not committing violations in their formation. Because of the possibility of committing violations or incurring demerits, the students are forced to try speaking the TL. Similarly, they proposed strategies on how to address their difficulties. Such strategies include the use of their journal, which they claimed to be effective in helping them correct their problems with grammar and sentence construction. The seminarians gained confidence in speaking in English by taking note of the corrections given in their journals. They were able to build a writing-to-speaking strategy, which helped them to address their concerns on their lack of ability in using the TL.

Although the participants claimed that writing in their journals helped them to gain confidence in using English in communicating in their L2 orally, it has to be noted that its effectiveness remains unproven, and may be a cause for another study.

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