

Transforming Writing: Using AI to Explore Genre, Audience, and Context in Multilingual Writing Classrooms



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ABSTRACT: This article explores how writing teachers can use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT to help multilingual writers experiment with genres and better understand how audience, purpose, and context shape writing. In a first-year writing course for multilingual students, AI was used in three ways: transforming academic essays into other genres, analyzing AI-generated products for genre features, and creating visuals to communicate ideas to new audiences. The activities described invite students to play and experiment with language (MLA-CCC Task Force, 2024). While some educators discourage AI use for multilingual writers, this approach offers a way to model ethical, creative engagement with tools students are already using—positioning AI as a resource for critical thinking, language exploration, and meaningful revision.

Keywords: genre transformation, genre competence, AI literacy, multilingual composition, collaborative learning

1. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (AI), such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Microsoft’s Copilot, have become a major part of the global educational experience, with 86% of students in an international survey admitting to using AI tools to complete their schoolwork and a quarter of students using these tools daily (Kelly, 2024). While students are consistently using AI for educational purposes, educators have mixed feelings on this use (Slagg, 2024). In a 2024 report, Carnegie Learning found that 77% of respondents saw AI as useful, with 56% of respondents regularly using it, while Hamilton (2024) found that over 60% of teachers, particularly those under 26 years old, are integrating AI in their teaching. While initial skepticism and ethical concerns persist (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022; Langreo, 2023), a majority of educators are now adopting AI in their classrooms.

Whether teachers are optimistic, cautious, or somewhere in between, about the educational uses of AI, there are ways that it can be used effectively in the classroom, and ethical use can be modeled for multilingual writers. The MLA-CCC Joint Task Force on Writing and AI (2024) recommends that the purpose of education, in the context of higher education, is to create space for “discovery, play, and experimentation” (p. 5), and this article proposes that writing instructors can use AI as a tool to play and experiment with the English language in the classroom, especially in the context of exploring genres. To demonstrate this, the article presents instructional recommendations for using AI tools, specifically ChatGPT, to delve into genre and features of it, experimenting with prompting (and re-prompting) to transform academic writing into new products that can be categorized into other formal and informal genres, which students then analyze for the

linguistic and structural features of these alternate genres, as well as determine the effectiveness of the AI-generated products within genres with which they are familiar.

While these activities have been implemented in a university composition course for multilingual writers, they can be applied to learners of various ages in a variety of educational contexts, because as Hamann-Ortiz (2019) explains, when students understand the components of particular genres, they are able to make effective rhetorical choices when writing. Brommer et al. (2024) expand that an understanding of genre, specifically to produce a variety of types of texts, is a vital professional competence, broadening the potential audience for this type of genre exploration. Thus, the aim of this article is to provide a lesson plan with practical activities that allow multilingual writers to explore genre through interactions with generative AI and in discussion with each other.

2. Genre, Competence, and Learning

In order to contextualize the teaching activities that follow in this article, it is important to first understand our core concept of genre. As a teacher of writing and English language, I start all new projects with my students with a clear definition of our key concept, and while there are many definitions, varying slightly across dictionaries and research, just as I would with my own students, this article adopts the definition from the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English: genre: “a particular type of art, writing, music, etc., which has certain features that all examples of this type share.” Therefore, genre represents a categorization of artifacts into broader classifications based on shared features.

Genre competence is crucial for multilingual writing students because it helps them understand and produce texts that align with reader expectations, especially in the educational setting where they must use a variety of academic genres. Hyland (2007) explains the need for writing to align with audience: “Writing is a practice based on expectations: the reader’s chances of interpreting the writer’s purpose are increased if the writer takes the trouble to anticipate what the reader might be expecting based on previous texts they have read of the same kind” (p. 149). Brommer et al. (2024) explain that identifying a genre involves analyzing several descriptive dimensions: situational (the context in which the text occurs), functional (the text’s purpose), thematic (recurring topics or ideas), structural (how the content is organized), and stylistic (language and tone) aspects. The researchers continue that individuals who possess genre competence are able to compose and categorize texts within various genres by utilizing the conventions of those genres, and they describe genre competence as encompassing not only an understanding of the structural, thematic, and linguistic features of particular genres, but also an awareness of the communicative purposes and contexts in which those genres are used. Ferris and Hedgcock (2023) reiterate the importance of communicative context in their definition of genre, building on the idea that context and situation are central by explaining that genres reflect shared communicative purposes and encompass diverse ways of acting and participating in social life through language. They offer examples of genres ranging from text messages to academic articles. Strong genre competence also involves genre metaknowledge, which Ferris and Hedgcock explain requires knowing and using the terminology of genre analysis. Hence, for our students to understand genre and grow their genre competence, they practice producing texts that fit different genres, as well as understand the context and conventions behind them.

In writing classrooms, there are a variety of pedagogical approaches that a teacher may employ, and while there is insufficient space to explore those diverse approaches in this article, the most relevant for this purpose is genre-based writing instruction. Hyland (2007) argues that genre instruction should move beyond grammar and vocabulary to include how language functions in context, helping students “exploit the expressive potential of society’s discourse structures instead of merely being manipulated by them” (p. 150). Thus, genre-based writing instruction enables students to both understand genre and improve their genre competence by considering the importance of the communicative purpose, giving their access to and an ability to meet target language expectations.

3. ChatGPT and Genre

While there are many no- to low-cost AI programs available, this article focuses on the use of ChatGPT, the tool recommended by students in the multilingual writing course for which these instructional activities were developed. However, the decision was reinforced due to an exploratory study completed by Brommer et al. (2024) that explored whether or not ChatGPT specifically was competent with text genre. Their work looked at ChatGPT's effectiveness to produce and categorize texts by genre, and they found that:

Overall, ChatGPT demonstrated competence at understanding and generating a variety of genres but challenges in terms of personalization, emphasis, recognizing figures of speech, and accurately shortening texts to a specified length [...and that] the more formalized a genre, the better ChatGPT performs (p. 25).

While their work does point out some shortcomings of the tool and its genre competence, for the purposes of introducing and exploring genre with multilingual writers, the successes of the tool are sufficient for in-class use. Thus, ChatGPT was adopted for these activities, but educators could experiment themselves with other tools to decide their effectiveness.

4. Study and Instructional Context

This project grew out of a classroom-based exploration of how multilingual writers engage with genre, audience, and purpose using generative AI. While not a formal research study, the activities were intentionally designed and implemented within a writing course to see how students interacted with AI-generated texts, applied genre concepts, and engaged with feedback. Over several phases, I observed students developing a stronger awareness of genre features and becoming more thoughtful in how they used and evaluated AI tools. These observations came from class discussions, peer reviews, and final reflections, and they offered valuable insights into how AI might support genre-based learning in writing classrooms.

While the ideas presented in this article in the following section can be adapted for use with multilingual writers with diverse English proficiency, in various academic and professional settings, and with different academic projects, these were created for use in a university composition course composed of first-semester multilingual writers. The primary instructional goals of the course are set by a first-year writing program and include: instruction and practice in academic literacy practices, especially writing summaries, analyses, and critical essays in response to assigned texts. The course also explores rhetorical strategies, genre awareness, and language diversity, and this section requires students in the course to engage in additional contact time with the instructor and a graduate or undergraduate tutor in small groups to give students extra support needed to fully develop their writing skills.

The second major writing project students produced was a critical essay on a social justice issue they were passionate about. Students' interests ranged from topics in health and criminal justice to education and technology. Their final essay was a three-page academic essay that used research-based sources to present their particular issue formally to another university student in an academic setting. In the process of writing, students were asked to be especially aware of the rhetorical situation, considering audience, context, and purpose, and the genre conventions of academic writing, such as formatting, citing sources, including a thesis statement, etc. Students had been introduced to ChatGPT throughout the course and the writing process for this critical analysis, using it for idea generation, outlining, and revising, so there was a familiarity with the tool through previous modeling and use.

5. Using AI to Explore Genre: Classroom Activities

The possibilities of how to use ChatGPT to help students understand genre are endless. In fact, ChatGPT could create a list of 20 possibilities in a matter of seconds, if prompted. However, this class used ChatGPT to engage with genre in three different ways: transforming academic texts into other genres, analyzing AI-created products for genre features, and creating images to visually represent academic ideas for different audiences.

5.1 Transforming Academic Texts into New Genres

Once essays were submitted, students were asked to think about how they could revise the piece for other audiences, continuing the work with rhetorical situation, and thinking about what the expectations of new forms would be. Together we put together lists of other kinds of artifacts these essays could become - ones they could share with their friends to promote an understanding of the issue, versions for social media for broader audiences, and even something they might share with their siblings or a younger audience to introduce them to the topic. Students proposed ideas such as commercials, memes, podcasts, poems, magazine articles, and songs.

Before beginning the transformation work, we paused for a focused conversation on AI and academic integrity. We discussed how the purpose of the activity was to explore genre—not to produce original, creditable writing for submission elsewhere. Students were reminded that while they were drawing from their own essays as a starting point, the products generated by ChatGPT were not authored by them and could not be submitted in other courses or published as their own. This activity was framed as a genre analysis and exploration task, not a creative writing or composition assignment. We talked about how there is a difference between writing something yourself and generating something through a tool, and that these AI-produced texts were meant to help us learn about genre features, not to be used as finished writing.

In pairs or groups of three, students selected one of their essays that they wanted to transform for a new audience and determined the genre they felt would be more effective. Then, they prompted ChatGPT to transform their academic work into that potential product. Students could use their own prompts but were provided the following instructor-generated model to adapt:

You've written an academic essay about (your social justice issue). Now imagine you want to raise awareness about your issue for (this audience) in (this genre/style). Transform your essay into (this new product).

For example, the student group focusing on effectiveness of drug education programs in secondary schools who wanted to transform their essay into a social media post for parents of high school students might revise the instructor's model prompt to:

You've written an academic essay about the effectiveness of drug education programs in secondary schools. Now imagine you want to raise awareness about your topic for parents of high school students in a social media post. Transform your essay into a Facebook post.

Once students received their ChatGPT-generated product, they were encouraged to review it carefully, discussing what changes they think would make it more effective, and re-prompt ChatGPT as desired to help shape the final product.

When students were satisfied with their new product, they engaged in informal classroom presentations, explaining their topic, their new audience, and the rationale for the genre/artifact they selected. They discussed the process of going from first to final draft and what features of the genre they considered as they worked to revise.

5.2 Analyzing AI-Generated Texts for Genre Accuracy

To build on this activity, after sharing their ChatGPT-generated products in a whole group setting, groups completed an in-depth analysis of another product. As reviewers, students first spent time brainstorming and listing their expectations of a product of that particular genre. They were encouraged to research other products from this genre online, and they used the following ChatGPT-generated genre analysis guiding questions (OpenAI, 2025):

“Choose a genre you want to learn more about (like a news article, TED Talk, opinion blog, Instagram post, etc.). Analyze a few examples to understand the key features of this genre. As you study the examples, answer these questions:

- Purpose: What is the main goal of texts in this genre (to inform, persuade, entertain, inspire, etc.)?
- Audience: Who is the intended audience? How do you know?
- Structure: How are texts in this genre usually organized (headings, paragraphs, bullet points, sections, captions)?
- Language and Style: What kind of language is used (formal, casual, technical, emotional)? Are there repeated words, phrases, or styles?
- Visual Elements: Are there images, videos, charts, emojis, colors? How important are visuals to this genre?
- Tone: Is the tone serious, playful, urgent, academic, sarcastic, etc.?
- Conventions: Are there specific “rules” or patterns that show up across different examples?”

The reviewers used these questions to expand on their list of expectations of the genre, and then they were asked to review their peers’ (the creators) ChatGPT-generated product for its effectiveness in their chosen genre for their target audience. Reviewers were tasked with highlighting in one color the parts of the new product that were effective and aligned with the genre as well as highlighting areas of potential improvement. Reviewers also had to provide written annotations explaining their choices, which they shared with the creators. Creators reviewed the feedback and were given the opportunity to clarify as needed with the reviewers. Creators were allowed another re-prompting and revision to their final product before submitting.

5.3 Creating Images to Visualize Genre and Audience

The final step in this AI genre transformation project was engaging in a reflection with a visual component. All students submitted a written or audio reflection about their feedback, their choice and rationale to (not) revise, and their thoughts about the effectiveness of their final artifact, based on the phases of this exploration above. They were also asked to use ChatGPT to create an image that could be paired with their product. To facilitate their image creation, groups were given guidelines for prompt generation as well as a model prompt, created in ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025):

Use ChatGPT to help you design an image that represents your social justice issue. Your goal is to create an image that sparks emotion, raises awareness, or encourages action.

When you ask ChatGPT to generate the image, include details like:

- The issue (What social justice topic are you focusing on?)
- The mood or emotion you want the image to express (hope, urgency, sadness, empowerment, etc.)
- Important symbols, colors, or settings you want to include
- The audience you are trying to reach (young adults, community members, policymakers, etc.)

Example model prompt: ‘Create an image that represents food insecurity in urban areas. The mood should be urgent but hopeful. Include a city skyline, empty grocery bags, and people helping each other. Use muted colors with a few bright accents. The audience is young adults who can volunteer.’

As images were generated, students were encouraged to re-prompt as needed to find the image they felt was most compelling for their issue and audience. Once they selected an image, they added it to the

reflection, presenting their choice of image and the rationale for their choice, especially why/how they felt it represented their topic effectively.

6. Conclusion

In transforming their own academic writing with ChatGPT into new genres, students experience firsthand how audience, context and purpose shape writing choices. They see how those choices can be effective, and how in re-evaluating an artifact's effectiveness across multiple iterations, they can purposefully revise their product to increase that effectiveness. Using AI allows them to do this in more sophisticated ways and in less time than they could by creating their own projects, whether that be creating physical posters to represent their topic or writing poetry or lyrics.

Students are able to use AI as an educational tool to brainstorm, create and assist with analysis, in ways that extend far beyond essay generation or revision. ChatGPT's use in this way promotes a deeper understanding of writing, rhetorical choices, and the importance of not only adapting their message for different audiences and contexts but analyzing its effectiveness. These AI activities provide hands-on learning experiences that also engage students in thinking about the intersection of technology and creativity in writing, and engaging in this work not only helped improve students' writing and rhetorical skills but also sparked discussions on the future of AI in writing and fostered critical thinking and technological literacy among students.

The Author

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