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# In Between Voices

Creative Writing in a Second Language

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<p>This thesis consists of two parts: a case example of a feature film screenplay called <i>The Worshipful Company of Bakers</i>, and a theoretical part that deals with the concept of a writer's voice and especially the 'voice' of second language writers.</p> <p>This study uses a qualitative approach to investigate the relationship between second language creative writing and the voice of a writer. It uses mostly secondary data, with the exception of the final chapter, which is uses a case study approach of my personal experience with the subject, with the emphasis on my first English language feature film script.</p> <p>The central argument of the thesis is that second language creative writing proves that a unique writer's voice can be acquired later in life. Examples of both classic second language writers (such as Joseph Conrad, Samuel Beckett) and modern day second language writers (such as Hannu Rajaniemi, Elif Shafak) are used as reference.</p>	
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<p>Tämä opinnäytetyö on monimuotoinen. Työ koostuu kirjallisesta osasta ja teososana kirjoitetusta pitkän elokuvan käsikirjoituksesta <i>The Worshipful Company of Bakers</i>.</p> <p>Kirjallinen opinnäytetyö käsittelee kirjoittajan 'ääntä' (writer's voice) konseptina toiskielisen luovan kirjoittamisen kautta. Työssä pyritään selvittämään, mitkä asiat vaikuttavat kirjoittajan äänen muodostumiseen, ja kuinka suuri vuorovaikutus kirjoittajan kielen ja äänen välillä on.</p> <p>Työ on toteutettu kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena, jonka lähteinä käytetään sekä vanhempia, että uudempia toiskielisiä kirjoittajia Joseph Conradista Hannu Rajaniemeen. Opinnäytetyön viimeisessä luvussa tarkastellaan teososana toimivaa <i>The Worshipful Company of Bakers</i> -käsikirjoitusta, ja sen kirjoittamisprosessia.</p>	
Avainsanat	kirjoittajan ääni, toiskielisyys, toisella kielellä kirjoittaminen

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## 1 Introduction

An initial objective of this thesis was to identify the reasons behind why some writers, including myself, choose to work in a language that is not their mother tongue. Because language is a fundamental tool for writers, this choice has been an object of criticism throughout second language creative writing. This phenomenon is a major area of interest within the field of linguistics, and in consequence a great deal of research in this thesis comes from studies of second language acquisition.

The main disadvantage of second language creative writing is that of linguistic fluency. The argument that non-native writers can never acquire enough authenticity to be successful is one of the most frequently stated problems regarding it. However, the alleged limitations of second language writing could be a contributing factor to a strong, unique 'writer's voice'.

Previous research has established that a writer's voice is a rather vague concept. It is widely discussed and analyzed, but to date there has been little agreement on what the term truly encompasses. Factors found to be influencing a writer's voice have been explored in several studies, from which the main one used in this thesis is Peter Elbow's *Writing with Power*.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the relationship between language and the voice of a writer. The central question, are you born with your voice or can you create it?, is studied first through the theory of a writer's voice, and then through the experiences and findings of second language creative writers.

This study uses a qualitative case study approach to investigate second language creative writing. It uses mostly secondary data, with the exception of the final chapter, which consists of observational data of my personal experience with the subject, with the emphasis on my first English language feature film script *The Worshipful Company of Bakers*. The reader should bear in mind that the thesis is based on film and television studies, and is therefore unable to encompass the entire complexity of linguistic research. The aim is to engage mainly with writers who have made an impact in my field of study.

The thesis is composed of three themed chapters. The first chapter will examine the concept of writer's voice. It aims to analyze what makes a writer's voice strong, and questions if writers can evolve their voice through time. Lastly, the section looks at the connection between voice and language.

Chapter Two begins by explaining why certain writers choose to use a second language as their main working language, and introduces the term 'exophony', which means the practice of writing in a language that is not one's mother tongue. The term will be used in this thesis to refer to all second language creative writers, from Samuel Beckett to Haruki Murakami.

The final chapter presents my personal findings in the field of exophonic writing, and compares my writing experience with previously mentioned exophones. I argue for the compatibility of second language writing and screenwriting, and analyze my first English language feature screenplay in search of my writer's voice.

## **2 Writer's Voice**

'Writer's voice' (or 'voice', as it will be later referred to as) is a commonly-used term in different forms of writing and yet it is a concept difficult to define precisely. In the broadest sense, "your voice is your self in the story" (Freese 2018). Voice has come to be used to refer to something unique a writer brings to their work. Thus, the terms most commonly used to describe a writer's voice are 'personality' and 'view of the world'.

In the second edition of *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols (2010) talks specifically about the voice of documentary films, but his breakdown of the concept of voice is also relevant with other types of films and forms of writing. He describes voice as the presence of the filmmaker in their own film. The filmmaker speaks through the film to the viewer using all the means accessible to her. Everything that happens on screen, all we see and hear, is a choice made by the filmmaker to convey their unique view of the world to an audience. (Nichols 2010.) Similarly, a book author uses their voice to speak through narrative elements of their story, to relate their worldview to the reader.

Searching through any writer's work for recurring visual motifs, types of protagonists and overall themes can result in a sort of recipe for that writer's style. Other elements, such as pace, dialogue-to-action ratio, and the use and mix of different genres are also

factors that can define a certain writer's style. The terms style and voice are often used interchangeably and without precision when talking about the work of a writer. For example, Quentin Tarantino's use of intertextuality, unconventional storytelling devices (such as non-linearity), extreme violence, and Mexican stand-offs are all part of his writing style. These elements are the ingredients of a story and are rather part of the style than the voice of the writing.

According to Nichols, "style facilitates the voice" (2010, 89). He explains that style is the way a film looks, flows, and sounds like, and voice is the way in which these elements of style are used to communicate with the audience (Nichols 2010, 89). In other words, voice is "the effect of style" (Pattison, 2007). For example, genres are created by using specific style elements, but even if two films use the exact same conventions of the same genre, they will most likely still have a unique voice of their own. Tarantino thinks that every filmmaker creates a genre of their own: "I think every movie is a genre movie. A John Cassavetes movie is a John Cassavetes movie. Eric Rohmer movies are their own genre" (McGrath 2012).

When thinking about writer's voices in films, it should be considered that many, if not all the notable voice writers are in fact writer-directors, just like previously mentioned Tarantino, Cassavetes and Rohmer are. Screenwriting blogger Carson Reeves (2013) lists Wes Anderson, the Coen brothers, Cameron Crowe and John Hughes as other examples, and debates on how much the direction amplifies the voice of their writing. (Reeves 2013.) That is to say, if another person were to direct a Wes Anderson film, would the audience still recognize it as a Wes Anderson script?

To keep focus on the act of writing, this thesis will omit further discussion on this topic of auteur theory, and focus strictly on writers of various mediums. The next chapter aims to describe what gives certain writers such strong, easily recognizable voices, and questions how or if it is possible to acquire or improve a writer's voice with time.

## 2.1 Good Voice

One frequently debated issue regarding writer's voice is if it can only be found in some writing, or if it is a feature that is present in all writing (Elbow 2007, 12). This thesis argues that a voice is the writer's personality on page, and that the ability of writing with voice is accessible to all writers. Not all writing does, however, have a voice. Technical

writing and many textbooks are good examples of texts that lack voice. In television serials, scriptwriters often work in groups where everyone's primary goal is to produce writing that is in line with the show's genre, style and character. In these types of serials, an individual scriptwriter is not recommended to have a distinguished voice of her own, but rather make sure their writing is seamless within the group.

While a story can be analyzed quite straight-forwardly by its structure and the use of other narrative elements, a voice is a much more difficult aspect to examine in writing. For Elbow (1998), a voice is resonance that can be felt when a text "rings true". Good voice holds power, which Elbow calls "juice". He believes that this power is readily available for all writers, and that to acquire it, writers must practice relinquishing control (1998, 307). This definition is close to that of screenwriter Charlie Kaufman's, who believes it is important to "free yourself in order to do your work" (Kaufman 2011).

The theory that voice shines through text only when the writer lets go of control, lends to the previously discussed definition of a writer's voice being personality on the page. A good voice could therefore be more aptly called a strong voice, since what makes it good is its ability to be heard. In literature, a strong writer's voice can be recognized by its effectiveness in carrying meaning. Text that is written with strong voice helps the reading experience and makes the text easier to comprehend, almost as if the writer was reading the book aloud to the reader. (Elbow 2007, 7.) In screenwriting, a strong voice is one that gets recognized through the final film or show, and that has the power to "convince us by the strength of their point of view" (Nichols 2010, 68).

Like previously suggested, the writer's voice is not interchangeable with the style of their writing. What really gives any writing a strong voice must then be the way the writer curates all the elements of their story, i.e. how they see the world they have built and how that view is conveyed to the reader. To put this individual view of the world onto a page, a writer needs language to translate their vision into text.

## 2.2 The Bilingual Writer's Voice

For all writers in different mediums, language is the most important tool of their trade. Language is the medium that gives form to the writer's voice, and bridges the empty spaces between elements of style and narrative devices. What happens then, when a



writer replaces the familiar, almost instinctive ease of their native language to another, foreign one?

Samuel Beckett, an Irish writer who chose French as his working language, was an advocate of second language creative writing. He thought the unfamiliarity of a second language was helpful in creating something original. (Madigan 2017.) In a 1937 letter, Beckett writes:

More and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and style. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman. (cited in Devenney & Sussman 2001, 140.)

While Beckett, known for his absurd and minimalist works, felt that this approach enabled him to write “without style” (Madigan 2017), another bilingual writer, Marcel Proust, felt the exact opposite. Proust thought that writing in a second language was a way to define a unique writing style. Because of the lack of fluency and advanced vocabulary, the writer must be imaginative in their storytelling, thus creating new imagery. (Greenleese 2011.)

This sense of unfamiliarity is an overarching theme among bilingual writers, and a big inspiration for many. The unfamiliarity challenges writers to think creatively, but also grants freedom from the confines of the mother tongue. Japanese writer and filmmaker Haruki Murakami noticed, when switching over to writing in English, that the “limitations of writing in a foreign language [...] removed the obstacles he faced trying to write in his native one” (Collom 2016). Murakami escaped his writer’s block by changing the language he was writing in. He says: “I had the feeling that I would be able to express my emotions so much more directly than if I wrote in Japanese” (Murakami & McInerney 1992).

Not all writers experience this freedom, even if technically capable of writing in a second language. In an article about bilingual writers, Sehgal (2017) describes her own attempt of second language writing: “It was an unpleasant, embarrassing exercise, like being blindfolded and shoved into a strange room. Every direction I turned brought me into thudding collision with my limits”. She questions why any writer would want to limit themselves this way, but admires bilinguals who “relish feeling ungainly and unsure”. (Sehgal 2017.)

Stephen King (2000, 127) says in his book *On Writing* that “fear is at the root of most bad writing”. With this statement, he joins Kaufman (2011) and Elbow (1998) in thinking that fear of letting go of control stands in the way of good writing. It seems to me that what most bilingual writers accomplish by switching their writing language is to overcome some of this fear. While writing outside of their comfort zones in terms of language, writers are given a unique chance to release preconceived notions about their style. The lack of fluency forces the text into its most simplistic form, and thus enables ideas to take center stage.

This section has analyzed the meanings and makings of a writer’s voice and has argued that a strong voice is the result of a writer relinquishing control, and letting their personality dictate the story on the page. The next part of this thesis will focus on a select group of writers, who have chosen to write in a language other than their mother tongue. It argues that multilingual writers possess by default a unique point of view, and a courage to step out of their comfort zones, and therefore have great odds to develop a one-of-a kind writer’s voice.

### **3 Writing in a Second Language**

The limits of my language are the limits of my mind. All I know is what I have words for.  
– Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922)

Second language creative writing has always been around in literature and mainstream media. Many acclaimed English literature works have been written by non-native speakers, such as Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955) and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899). These works are universally celebrated as important pieces of English literature, even though the authors have acquired the language later in life.

In the case of Joseph Conrad, he was born and raised in Poland, and he learned English as an adult by reading Shakespeare, as well as listening and talking with local fishermen on his voyages to England. The choice to start writing in English came without hesitation for him.

“When I wrote the first words of *Almayer’s Folly*, I had been already for years and years *thinking* in English. I began to think in English long before I mastered [it]”.  
(Meyers 1991, 89-90.)

There are as many reasons why writers step away from their native languages as there are writers themselves, but the predominant reasons can be broken down into three distinct categories.

The first category are those writers who are the products of historical trauma and dislocation, who have had to abandon their mother tongues. One example is writer Aleksandar Hemon, who was visiting America in 1992 when war broke out in his home country of Bosnia. Unable to return home, he started writing in English and published his first second language story in 1995. (Lichtig 2015.) Another notable example is Vladimir Nabokov, who was driven to exile by the Russian Revolution in 1917, and moved around from Cambridge to Berlin, to Paris, and finally to America in 1940. All the while, Nabokov kept writing in Russian without much success, until 1941 when he begrudgingly changed his language to English. (Lodge 2004.) In an afterword to *Lolita*, written in 1956, Nabokov still reminisces the loss of his beloved mother tongue:

My private tragedy [...] is that I had to abandon my natural idiom, my untrammelled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian tongue for a second-rate brand of English, devoid of any of those apparatuses — the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions — which the native illusionist, fractails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way. [cited in Sehgal 2017.]

A second category are writers who have a natural affinity for another language, or who seek a stylistic change for their writing, like Indian-American writer Jhumpa Lahiri, who abandoned her native English and started writing strictly in Italian. Lahiri represents the relatively small category of writers, who have decided to stop writing in the global language of English, and started working in a lesser known language. (Collom 2016.)

The final, and arguably the largest category unites most of modern day second-language writers, and consists of writers who have changed their working language because of commercial sensibility, in the hopes of finding a larger audience for their work (Nolan 2016).

This categorization indicates that the majority are writers who choose to adopt a foreign language of their free will as the language of their writing. This group of writers are called 'exophones', or 'exophonic writers'. While the cultural and historical importance of the first mentioned group of exiled writers should not be dismissed, this research has

been narrowed down to focus on the exophonic writers who willingly choose to work outside their mother tongues.

### 3.1 Exophonic Writers

The word 'exophony' comes from the Greek word *éxō*, meaning 'outer, external' and *phōnē*, meaning 'sound, voice'. The term is often traced back to a collection of Japanese language essays by Japanese-German writer Yoko Tawada. She first heard the term in a conference held in Senegal, where it was used to describe non-native-speaker writers from different countries. (Wright 2008, 39.) The collection, titled *Exophony – Traveling Outside the Mother Tongue* features essays about the experiences of writers who are "living in more than one language" (Slaymaker 2007, 3).

Wright (2008) explains that the adjective "exophonic" (derived from the noun "exophony") has now become a widely used term in place for the rather patronizing term "non-native speakers /writers". The term encompasses a group of writers, who, while technically can be called non-native speakers, are in terms of fluency and facility with the language equal with native speakers. The reason this group of writers needs a term of their own, says Wright, is mostly to draw attention to the innovative stylistic features of their work, which are developed from their unique experiences of other languages and cultures. (Wright 2008.)

"When a writer whose mother tongue is a minor language begins to create in a major language such as English, a certain change occurs in the target language. The change is not limited solely to the linguistic level. [...] One who belongs to a small linguistic community is less likely to run the risk of looking at history from the victorious side." (Tawada 2003, cited in Slaymaker 2007, 30.)

What Tawada writes about here, correlates through the entire exophonic community all the way back to Joseph Conrad. The thing that resonates with readers in Conrad's writing is something "other", something that his English colleague Rudyard Kipling, author of such works as *The Jungle Book* (1894), begrudgingly acknowledged:

"His spoken English was sometimes difficult to understand but with a pen in his hand he was first amongst us [...] When I am reading him, I always have the impression that I am reading an excellent translation of a foreign author" (Meyers 1991, 206).

Through his Polish background, Conrad could write about a cultural experience that previously had no voice in the English language. The same can be said about Mura-

kami, who's writer's voice is strongly defined by an outside perspective of his native Japanese culture. Murakami feels it is important for exophones to write in English, and "break through the barrier of isolation [of our native language] so that we can talk to the rest of the world in our own words" (Murakami & McInerney 1992). This is the central advantage point of all exophonic writers: their writer's voice already has a strong base, because of their unique multicultural point of view.

### 3.2 A New English

If you want to talk about something new, you have to make up a new kind of language.  
– Haruki Murakami

The number of exophonic writers has increased in the past decade, and will continue growing with the globalization of the world (Wright 2008, 26). This is already evident in the film and television industry, where international collaboration has become a norm, or maybe even a prerequisite for financial success.

Likewise, in the literary world of publishing, it seems that the way to get published and reach a large audience is writing in English. According to a 2016 article in *The Guardian*, only 1.5% of all books published in the UK are translations (Erizanu 2018). The problem lies in the culture of English speaking countries that do not promote the learning of second languages, a fact that creates an inability to consume foreign literature in its original form. Nolan (2016) suggests that the act of exophonic writing "can be seen as a case of self-perpetuating this "boundary" to Western publishing success". (Nolan 2016.) While the higher chance of success remains a big point of attraction in exophonic writing, it does not directly mean the abandonment of smaller languages in favor of the English language.

The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe calls exophonic writing "extending the frontiers of English" (Ogbaa 1999). Given the previous evidence of the lasting impact of the writings of Joseph Conrad and Vladimir Nabokov, it can be viewed that exophonic writers do not merely borrow the second language of their choosing, but are constantly building and making valuable contributions to it. Exophones challenge the conventional use of the English language, and in ways, are creating a "new English".

The biggest challenge facing exophonic writers is the question of who owns the English language for legitimate self-expression. The lack of perfect proficiency and knowledge of specific discourse conventions are often considered hindering facts in academic writing, but is this the case also with creative writing, a field where personal style and creative freedom should be allowed? (Zhao 2015, 15.) Is an exophone's ultimate goal to pass as a native speaker?

Knowledge and fluency in language are considered fundamentally important factors when it comes to good literature. The writing needs to flow and be easily understood for the reader to be absorbed in the story. In an article about the difficulties of foreign language writing, Ostrauskas (1957) argues that exophonic writing can never achieve this kind of flow, because non-native writers will always need to "labor to achieve that which comes naturally to [their] native colleagues". In Ostrauskas's opinion, a writer is rarely, if ever, able to acquire a distinct writer's voice in a second language, because the new language does not flow from the heart and soul of the writer, but rather her brain. "Which serious and conscientious writer, consciously wishes to limit his creative powers and at the same time lessen the artistic value of his work?", he asks. (Ostrauskas 1957.) In the following chapter, this question will be further examined through experiences of several exophonic writers.

### 3.3 Dual Identity

"Learn a new language and get a new soul" — Czech proverb

As previously mentioned, the biggest draw of modern day second language writing is the promise of a larger audience and increased likelihood of financial success. Especially in the entertainment industry, where the English language firmly holds the 'lingua franca' status, it is an increasingly common requirement for people to switch their working language to English. But the most interesting experiences come from a large number of exophones, who are not driven by these motives, but by an instinctive sense of dual identity between two languages.

For most exophones, English is acquired in school and kept in use through media consumption and being constantly surrounded by it online, in advertising, and in technology. Like Joseph Conrad, thinking in English long before starting to write in it, many exophones feel that they have grown into the language and only later discovered their

preference of writing in it. An exception to this is when writers study in a second language and then immediately begin their career with that chosen language, identifying as exophonic writers from the beginning (Gleibermann 2017; Rajaniemi 2010).

Exophonic writers can be further divided into two groups: the first group consisting of writers who write exclusively in their second language, and the other group, who write in both. In both of these groups, a vast percentage of exophones share a similar feeling of having different personalities and voices in each language (Slaymaker 2007; Perez Firmat 2011; Gleibermann 2017; Rajaniemi 2010; Shafak 2014).

Many exophones describe feeling insecure when writing in their native language, compared to their second language. For some, the success of other native writers feels too daunting to follow up, and writing in another language frees them from that pressure and enables them to start fresh (Greenleese 2011). Other exophonic writers, like Finnish science-fiction author Hannu Rajaniemi, say that their native language is very personal to them, and they prefer to keep a distinction between the personal and working languages (Rajaniemi 2010).

The function of writing in a second language seems to have varied purpose depending on the writer. Rajaniemi uses the separation between the two languages to give him helpful distance that allows him to "look at [my] own text in a problem-solving way" (Rajaniemi 2010). Carrington uses new languages to write almost anonymously, from behind the mask of languages (Sehgal 2017). This mask is synonymous with the 'veil' Samuel Beckett talked about in his 1937 letter, but with the complete opposite purpose of Carrington's. Beckett believed that second language writing took away the mask of grammar and style and exposed his bare talent, stripped of the embellishments of his native tongue, compared to Carrington, who used new languages to conceal herself. (Devenney & Sussman 2001, 140; Madigan 2017; Sehgal 2017).

Depending on the writer's mother tongue, the differences between writing in the two languages comes in many forms. Japanese writers often experience a sort of freedom when switching from Japanese to English, because the English language lacks the hierarchical elements that define Japanese, thus making it more direct (Murakami 1992; Sehgal 2017). Rajaniemi, on the other hand, finds that his English writer's voice is more outgoing than his Finnish one (Rajaniemi 2010). Shafak explains, that different

emotions and tones are easier to express in different languages. For her it is natural to write about sorrow in her native Turkish, and humor in English. (Shafak 2014.)

The social relations between languages are another factor that can influence exophonic writing. Writer Gustavo Perez Firmat, who writes in both Spanish and English, describes hearing his Cuban father's voice in Spanish and his American wife's voice in English. He feels this has a strong impact on the way in which he uses both languages. (Perez Firmat 2011.)

What should be considered, then, is whether the quality of the language itself grants writers these new identities, or if the identity is rather coming from the culture that is associated with said language (Delistraty 2013). Is Rajaniemi more outgoing when writing in English, because of the way in which he can present his thoughts in English, or because using a second language allows him distance from his own text, and so, increases his confidence?

What seems more important, when trying to find a voice behind exophonic writing, is "the gap formed between two languages" (Tawada cited in Slaymaker 2007, 5). Exophony is not as simple as mastering one or another language, but rather the experience of a writer living in this gap where both languages exist simultaneously (Slaymaker 2007, 47). In my opinion, exophones are unique exactly for this reason. They are not merely translating their native language ideas and thoughts to a second language, but creating from this curious point of view, from between languages, cultures and identities.

Having discussed how second language creative writing impacts writer's identities and their writer's voices, the final section of this thesis will focus on my personal findings on the subject by examining my first English language screenplay.

#### **4 Writer's Voice in My Screenplay**

I am a native Finnish speaker, born and raised in Finland with an all-Finnish family and friends. But for ten years now, I have used English as my main language for writing and reading. From larger projects such as screenplays and novels, to journal entries, to even grocery lists, I find that it feels more natural for me to write in English. This has become even more apparent during my screenwriting studies, where I am required to



write in Finnish. Often, I have found myself struggling with writer's block that has almost instantly subsided once I have switched my language back to English. This experience is shared by many exophones, where switching the language frees the mind of its own clutches, as it finds a "new form of expression" (Collom 2016; Murakami & McInerney 1992).

I view English as the language of storytelling. My love of Hollywood movies, American TV-shows and British rock'n'roll have, from a very young age, influenced the way I consume and think about stories. After learning the basics of English in middle school, I started reading English language books in their original editions, and never went back to translations. In fact, I credit most of my knowledge of the language to the *Harry Potter* book series. This informal, media-centered approach to the language is both my biggest pride, and my deepest insecurity of being an exophonic writer.

As previously discussed, one of the main challenges of exophonic writing is the lack of indigenous knowledge of the second language. Because I have never formally studied the English language further than strictly necessary, I am far from being fluent in it. Grammar and sentence structures, for example, are things I am not that familiar with. What strikes many people as odd, is that I do not seem bothered by this. Marina Warner, who teaches creative writing for non-native students, sums up my thoughts on the matter exactly: "Perfection of linguistic fluency isn't of prime importance for expressive power" (Warner 2012). I believe the linguistic mistakes I am bound to make in first drafts can be fixed later. The freedom of expression that comes with writing in my second language is worth the grammatical errors.

This is where the medium of screenwriting can be thought of as an answer to this particular exophonic challenge. To examine this thought further, it is necessary to return briefly again to Samuel Beckett's description of writing in a second language:

"More and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things [...] behind it" (cited in Devenney & Sussman 2001, 140).

Beckett found, when switching his native English to French that by losing his fluency and large vocabulary, he was suddenly more capable of conveying ideas in a clear way (Madigan 2017). What Beckett essentially does here, is sum up the basics of screenwriting.

Screenwriting is not a medium for linguistic acrobatics. In most cases, a screenplay is not intended to be a piece of literature, but rather a blueprint of a film or TV-show. What, arguably, is the most important function of a script, is conveying ideas in such a clear way that a whole production crew can understand them. I think this is a key point that speaks for the compatibility of second language writers and screenwriting.

Besides the concise, idea-driven characteristics of exophonic writing, I argue that exophones also have good chance of writing strong dialogue. As with Joseph Conrad, who learned the colloquial language by listening to English sailors (Meyers 1991, 89), so it is with most exophonic writers, that they learn by listening to native speakers talking. Since dialogue is meant to be informal, and is the only part of screenwriting that is heard in the final film or TV-show, the sort of imitation based writing has strong potential for honest dialogue.

*The Worshipful Company of Bakers* is my first English language feature film script. The idea for it came to me when I was an exchange student in Falmouth University in England. I already knew I wanted to write my thesis in English, so I decided to use my screenwriting module in Falmouth as preparation for it. My class was required to write a treatment for an original feature film, which would consist of a synopsis, an outline, character biographies, and a 'route to market' and 'about the writer' -sections.

The task seemed daunting for the other foreign language exchange students, even the ones who were far more experienced writers than I was. I, a comparatively seasoned exophone, was beyond excited. My English creative writing would finally be read and assessed by a native writer.

During the course, I did struggle with the plot and characters, but the writing itself flowed much easier than it had ever done during my studies in Finland. I crafted the story to be set between two locations: an ambiguous city in an undefined country, and a green forest oasis that could be found almost anywhere in the world. I wanted all the characters to have different backgrounds and ethnicities, mirroring my current group of multicultural friends.

The assessment I received of my work exceeded my expectations, and is used here as reference for the search of my own writer's voice. I got praise for my "fluid" and "vivid" language, as well as my story that felt "wonderfully toned, imaginative and involving

[...] familiar and original” (personal grade markings). One note of improvement I received was concerning the tone of my overall writing, which varied between projects. To me, this note proved that I could use different tones in different stories, and that my use of the language was versatile enough to generate several voices.

Only after I had returned to Finland and started researching exophonic writing for my thesis, I realized the connection between my story and my personal exophonic situation between two languages. “The poetic ravine separating two languages”, that Tawada (cited in Slaymaker 2007, 5) speaks about was the place where my story was unintentionally set. Like my protagonist, Alice, who is torn between a mechanic city and a lush forest, I was torn between my sensible native Finnish and the excitingly unfamiliar English language.

When I am writing in English, I am much more relaxed than when writing in Finnish. I feel the text is closer to the images I have in my mind, whereas in Finnish I often feel a sort of embarrassment over the inadequacy of my own words. The “juice” of writing (Elbow 1998, 286) feels utterly unattainable to me in my native tongue. It is worth considering, though, if the ease I feel when writing in English stems from the distance I have between myself and the language. Am I using my second language as a shield against criticism?

Elbow examines the difference between “a voice” and “a real voice” through an example of a radio announcer. An announcer’s voice can be “full of expression”, yet be simultaneously “blatantly fake”. A writer, too, can have a distinct voice on paper, but unless it is “deeply authentic or resonant”, it might remain only as an imitation of an expression-filled voice. The most important conclusion made with this example is that there is a distinction between verbal fluency and verbal power. (Elbow 1993, 292–298.)

I only have my personal experiences to use as evidence on the matter. During the writing process of *The Worshipful Company of Bakers*, I felt confident and was able to write at a rapid pace. Especially when writing dialogue, I sensed a definite improvement in confidence compared to my Finnish writing. It is very hard for me to imagine I could ever write the same story in Finnish.

In this thesis, I have used many quotes from writers talking about the importance of freeing oneself to write with a strong voice. Charlie Kaufman says, that the major ob-

stacle that stands in the way of writing with your unique voice is “[the] deeply seated belief that ‘you’ is not interesting” (Kaufman 2011). While I do not expect my writer’s voice to be fully developed yet, or even present in my first screenplay, I know I have at least the makings of a voice. My position as an exophonic writer and my strong pull towards the English language gives me reason to believe that with enough hard work I can facilitate voice in my writing.

## 5 Conclusion

The main goal of the current study was to examine how the voice of a writer is formed, especially through second language creative writing, i.e. exophony. Through the evidence found in this study, it seems that a strong writer’s voice is the result of a writer having a unique point of view, and then trusting that that point of view is interesting enough to carry their story. The study discussed the reasons for choosing a second language over one’s mother tongue, and investigated the effects that choice has on a writer’s voice.

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that exophony is a growing form of writing in the creative field. Where once it might have been a peculiar choice by a writer, in today’s globalized society it can at times seem like the prerequisite for success. The research has also shown that exophonic writing can, and already has earned recognition on the same level as native language writing.

The results of the research in exophony support the idea that a strong writer’s voice is not only something one is born with, but an ability that can be acquired. The success of exophonic writers revokes the argument that second language writers are unable to use their acquired language as skillfully as native writers can. In fact, it is argued that exophonic writers have a higher chance of developing a unique writer’s voice *because* of their position in between two languages.

The scope of this thesis was limited because of the two separate subjects. The main area of interest for me was the study of second language writing, which resulted in a limited analysis of the concept of writer’s voice. The study was also limited by the absence of data concerning second language screenwriting. Despite lengthy research, I was unable to find existing information on the subject, and had to resolve to use only

my personal observations. While this observational data was exciting for me to investigate, the generalizability of these results is subject to limitations.

The insights gained from this study will prove useful in expanding our understanding of how a writer's voice is formed, as it lays the groundwork for future research into second language writer's voices, particularly in the field of screenwriting.

In the future, I hope to use English as my main working language, but never intend to stop using Finnish all together. My main hope is to grow my writer's voice with the help of both languages, and if not combine the languages themselves, then at least write about my native culture in English words. I want to end with a quote from my exophonic hero, putting into words our shared dream of the future:

“Let us hope the time will come [...] when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused” — Samuel Beckett (in Devenney & Sussman 2001, 140).

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