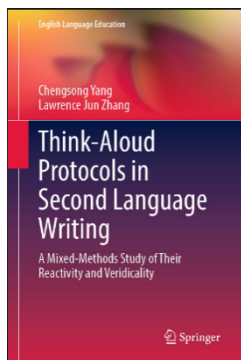


Book Review



[https://doi.org/ 10.52696/ZZJZ1665](https://doi.org/10.52696/ZZJZ1665)

Reprints and permission:

The Malaysian English Language Teaching Association

Corresponding Author:

Warid Mihat waridmihat@uitm.edu.my

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6525-3661>

Book Review: Think Aloud Protocols in Second Language Writing: A Mixed-Methods Study of Their Reactivity and Veridicality

Warid Mihat

Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kelantan

BOOK DETAILS

Think Aloud Protocols in Second Language Writing: A Mixed-Methods Study of Their Reactivity and Veridicality

Cheongsong Yang & Lawrence Jun Zhang (2023)

Switzerland: Springer

Pp.xv + 233

ISBN 978-3-031-39573-4

\$132.75

KEYWORDS: Language Processing, Research Method, Think Aloud Protocols, Writing

The challenge of teaching writing, particularly for students in their second language, often stems from the complexity of translating thoughts into written words and ensuring the product aligns with the task given. This predicament prompts English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers to explore various strategies to enhance the effectiveness of their instructions. One potential strategy for improving classroom approaches is through observing verbal reports made by the students, either as they complete a task (also called concurrent reporting or think-aloud protocols) or after completing the task (also called retrospective reporting) (Güss, 2018). This method allows insight into the cognitive processes of participants and, when triangulated with other data, can offer valuable information to teaching practices in the classroom.

Despite the potentials, think-aloud protocols have drawn criticisms regarding their veridicality and reactivity. By definition, veridicality examines whether the spoken thoughts genuinely reflect the internal cognition of the participants. Reactivity, on the other hand, considers the potential influence of think-aloud protocols on the cognitive processes they aim to capture. If reactivity is present, the data derived from think-aloud protocols may not accurately represent cognitive processes in their natural, non-verbalized state. These two concerns have formed the central discussion in the most recently published book by Yang and Zhang (2023), “Think Aloud Protocols in Second Language Writing: A Mixed-Methods Study of Their Reactivity and Veridicality” where they are investigating whether the use of think aloud protocols in L2 writing actually changes the cognitive processes that TAP is meant to capture and preserve.

To facilitate the comprehension of the book, Yang and Zhang (2023) have structured their work into nine chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 serve as comprehensive introductions to think-aloud protocols, offering a thorough examination of TAP historical evolution and diverse applications based on past studies. This dual-focused approach renders the book accessible to newcomers and seasoned researchers, providing a solid foundation for further understanding. Chapter 3 takes a deeper dive into the methodological aspects of investigating the veridicality and reactivity of think-aloud protocols through mixed methods design. By elucidating the specific techniques employed in this process, the chapter empowers readers with the knowledge and confidence needed to utilize think-aloud protocols within their own research contexts effectively. Chapters 4 through 7 offer a balanced discussion through on the overarching thesis of the book. Chapter 4 discusses the results from quantitative analysis, using 20 measures of fluency, complexity, accuracy, organization and content. Chapters 5, 6, 7 provide results from qualitative analysis on the participants’ reflections. Through these chapters, readers can critically engage with issues related to reactivity and veridicality from different angles and aspects. Chapter 8 is perhaps the most exciting part of the book where the findings seem to suggest that thinking aloud might not hinder the writing processes (reactivity) significantly, but it also does not seem to enhance L2 writers’ lexical diversity. TAP does work as a research tool, but not in terms of intervention. The book ends with Chapter 9, where the authors encapsulate the key insights and limitations gleaned from their investigation, providing readers with a succinct summary that ties the findings and discussion to the objectives of the book.

Yang and Zhang’s (2023) seminal work is a fundamental pillar in bridging the significant gap in one’s comprehension of TAP. According to, Azman et al. (2022), Godfread (2019) and Güss (2018), language processing research, including verbal reports, often encounters a significant issue: the lack of methodological explanation probably due to the nature of the publication – the word limit. This oversight impedes the replication of the target research and the dissemination of more accurate practices. However, the work of Yang and Zhang (2023) furnishes researchers with a blueprint to ensure the validity and reliability of their findings, thus marking this as the prominent strength of their book. Chapter 3, in particular, explains their preparation for data collection (data clean-up, verifying task conditions, and establishing procedures for analysing quantitative and verbal reports) to scrutinise the veridicality and reactivity issues in think-aloud protocols. The chapter also highlights the importance of combining more than just one method to accompany the data from TAP, through mixed-methods design. The protocols they outline in the book indirectly guide researchers on the necessary steps when conducting think-aloud protocol research and subsequently increase one’s confidence in applying TAP to improve the teaching of writing in their classroom.

Building upon the previous discussion that highlights the strengths of the book, it is also essential to address some of the limitations in Yang and Zhang's (2023) work. While the authors have acknowledged most of the limitations in Chapter 9, they have overlooked one significant aspect - the experimental setting. In language processing research, such as TAP, the mechanism under investigation and the setting chosen to study this mechanism are crucial elements (Godfroid, 2019). In the case of Yang and Zhang's (2023) work, the aim was to explore the veridicality and reactivity of TAP in writing activities observed through respondents individually. This traditional setting is indeed noteworthy. However, given the growing emphasis on collaborative work in ELT classrooms (Pham, 2021), the book would have been more academically intriguing and could have forged a stronger connection with classroom practices if the setting had been designed to investigate the veridicality and reactivity in collaborative writing tasks instead of individual ones. Perhaps, the results for lexical diversity (one of the measures in their study), would be different, if it had been done in that setting. Therefore, exploring this aspect in future work would be a valuable addition to the existing body of knowledge.

In conclusion, "Think Aloud Protocols in Second Language Writing: A Mixed-Methods Study of Their Reactivity and Veridicality" by Yang and Zhang (2023) has emerged as a prominent reference in the application and scrutiny of think-aloud protocols in the domain of second-language writing pedagogy. This work holds high value for ELT instructors seeking to refine their understanding in applying this tool to improve their writing sessions or for educators pursuing postgraduate studies. The implications are extensive and merit careful consideration from academics, researchers, and practitioners alike.

Acknowledgement

AI was ethically employed to enhance sentence clarity, and to identify grammatical errors and typos in the writing.

References

- Azman, H., Mihat, W., & Soh, O. K. (2021). Analyzing Stimuli Presentations and Exit-Interview Protocols to Improve Wearable Eye-Tracking Data Collection Guidelines for Reading Research. *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching (IJCALLT)*, 11(2), 51-65. <http://doi.org/10.4018/IJCALLT.2021040104>
- Godfroid, A. (2019). *Eye tracking in second language acquisition and bilingualism: A research synthesis and methodological guide*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315775616>
- Güss, C. D. (2018). What is going through your mind? Thinking aloud as a method in cross-cultural psychology. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01292>
- Pham, V. P. H. (2021). The effects of collaborative writing on students' writing fluency: An efficient framework for collaborative writing. *SAGE Open*, 11(1). 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244021998363>

Book Review: Think Aloud Protocols in Second Language Writing: A Mixed-Methods Study of Their Reactivity and Veridicality

Yang, C., & Zhang, L. J. (2023). Think-aloud protocols in second language writing: A mixed-methods study of their reactivity and veridicality. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-39574-1>