Exploring the Perceptions, Writing Strategies and Identity Dynamics in International Multilingual Graduate Students' Academic Writing in a Canadian University

by

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the perceptions, writing strategies, and identity dynamics of seven multilingual graduate students in a Canadian university's Faculty of Education. Drawing on the Academic Literacies approach (Lillis, 2001; Street & Lea, 1998, 2006), writer identity framework (Burgess and Ivanič's, 2010) and my expansion of it, Hyland's metadiscourse model (2005), and critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b; Cherryholmes,1988; Pennycook, 1997), the research analyzes data from semi-structured interviews with students and four instructors, student written assignments, and assignment rubrics.

Findings reveal that students felt the immense weight of academic conventions. This often led to taking a pragmatic stance where they prioritize academic success over challenging dominant norms. To build their academic voices, they employed strategies such as mimicking scholarly writing and utilizing their multilingual repertoires. This process represents constant identity negotiation that involves their autobiographical, discoursal, authorial, perceived writer and envisioned future writer selves.

Moreover, the results show a spectrum of agreement and divergence in student and instructor participants' views of academic writing, particularly concerning the role of voice and the nature and function of feedback. While Instructors and students acknowledged the challenge in presenting an academic, critical voice, students' perceptions of how to project that voice might not align with that of the instructors. For instance, some students' views on reflective writing and the use of the first-person pronoun "I" as ways of presenting authentic voice diverged from those of the instructors'

Furthermore, a significant misalignment appeared in feedback priorities: while instructors focused on higher-order concerns like argumentation, some students expressed a strong need for explicit guidance on micro-level grammatical and stylistic features to build their writerly confidence. Therefore, they resorted to external resources for feedback and writing support, such as AI language models, to address their micro-level concerns. The study concludes by offering pedagogical implications on the instructor and institutional levels to better support multilingual graduate writers.

Keywords: academic writing; multilingual graduate students; writer identity; Academic Literacies; pedagogical support

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the Study

In the global scene of higher education, international graduate students have emerged as a substantial constituency. They come from diverse cultural backgrounds and have different prior educational experiences and perspectives. At the same time, these students may experience “change, difficulty, crises of confidence, conflicts of identity, feelings of strangeness, [and] the need to discover the rules of an unfamiliar world” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 7). One aspect of this unfamiliar world is academic writing. In this respect, researchers adopting the Academic Literacies Approach (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006, 2014; Lea, 2004; Lillis, 2014) do not presuppose that students are unproblematically acculturated into the academic discourse, but rather the acculturation process is a complex one in which issues of identity, language, dominant literacy practices and the contested nature of knowledge play a central role (Canagarajah & Jerskey, 2009; Lea, 2004). Academic writing marks an extra challenge for multilingual students as dominant literacy practices cannot be easily transferred and the epistemological assumptions prevalent in the host academic context might be different from those of international students (Hyland, 2005).

In graduate school, academic writing adds other layers of challenge for international students. In this stage, students are required to prove their understanding of knowledge as well as construct new knowledge through carrying out complex tasks such as extended writing of research papers, presenting their findings to their peers and publishing their work (Tardy, 2005). This means that they are required to be active participants in their communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999) and act as insiders who have mastered the academic practices and norms of those communities (Jacobs, 2005). However, multilingual writers already belong to other communities of practice (Canagarajah, 2002) and their identities constructed through previous academic experiences interact with the discursive literacy conventions in the new sociocultural context (Ivanič, 1998). This entails that students may need to navigate new communicative strategies and rhetorical choices for conveying their arguments and

expressing their voices (Hyland, 2012, 2018b). Moreover, such strategies and choices may reveal a subtle dissonance between students' and instructors' understandings of the fundamental aspects of academic writing in areas of "epistemology, authority and contestation over knowledge" (Lea & Street,1998, p. 160).

In light of these complexities, learning academic writing becomes a multifaceted process for international multilingual graduate students. It requires more than linguistic proficiency and extends to identity negotiation and strategic rhetorical choices in their academic contexts. When these contexts are described as fixed, student writers are viewed to be "autonomous and socially neutral, or empty, subjects. Yet, particular identities are privileged in particular practices" (Lillis, 2001, p. 24). Therefore, academic writing is viewed as a social practice that represents a site of contestation and opposes the conceptualization of learning a set of across-context transferable skills (Ivanič, 1998; Lea, 1998, 2004; Lea & Street 1998; Lea & Street, 2014; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Turner, 1999). In my study, I will explore the identity dynamics that multilingual graduate students navigate in their academic writing and shed light on the strategies and the rhetorical choices that they employ. Moreover, I will investigate their perceptions of academic writing within the dominant discourses, which I use to refer to the legitimate norms and practices of knowledge production in a given academic context, and how students align with or challenge these discourses.

1.2. Research Questions

Researchers have argued that there is relative lack of research at the graduate level on the academic writing experiences of international multilingual students (e.g. Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Fergie et al., 2011; Henderson & Cook, 2020; Lea, 2012; McKenna, 2004). This is because of the general understanding that academic writing at this level "is thought of more as a baseline standard that entering students are expected to meet rather than a process or a practice to which students are habituated as they learn how to write and think in their various disciplines" Henderson & Cook, 2020, p. 52). Therefore, in this study I attempt to provide insights and contribute to the understanding of the construction of academic writing identities in higher education in general and in the Canadian context in particular. Specifically, my research investigates how multilingual graduate students negotiate their writer identities within dominant academic discourses that assume graduate students are expected to have gained the appropriate

rhetorical moves to carry out complex tasks such as writing research papers and producing knowledge (Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007; Lawrence & Zawacki, 2019; Tardy, 2005). Moreover, it examines the (non-)linguistic strategies that they employ to construct their writer identities and how they meet or resist academic expectations. So, the following questions guide my research:

1. How do international multilingual graduate students negotiate their identities in academic writing?
2. What strategies do they use to construct their identities as novice researchers within dominant academic discourses?
3. To what extent do their perceptions of academic writing align with the dominant discursive practices and instructors' perspectives?

To answer the research questions, I employ four theoretical frameworks (see Diagram 1). For the first question, I employ two frameworks. The first was the Academic Literacies framework (Lillis, 2001; Street & Lea, 1998, 2006) as it views academic writing as a socially situated practice which involves identity formation and represents a site of contestation (Ivanič, 1998; Lea, 1998, 2004; Lea & Street 1998; Lea & Street, 2014; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Turner, 1999). The second one is Burgess and Ivanič's (2010) framework of writer identity and my extension of it. Burgess and Ivanič view writer identity construction and negotiation as a process that works within five aspects—*the authorial self*, *the discoursal self*, *the socially available possibilities for selfhood*, *the authorial self* and *the perceived writer*. I added *the future self* as a fifth aspect to examine the relationship between identity construction and students' aspirations and goals (see Chapter 2).

As for the second research question, I employed my adapted version of Burgess and Ivanič's (2010) framework of writer identity and Hyland's (2005) interactional model of academic writing. The reason behind choosing these two frameworks was to understand the relationship between constructing academic identities and the strategies that students employ to produce academic texts. Both frameworks helped me identify the (non-)linguistic features that students utilize in their attempt to build their writer identities.

The third question was answered through employing the framework of critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b; Cherryholmes,1988; Pennycook, 1997) in order to

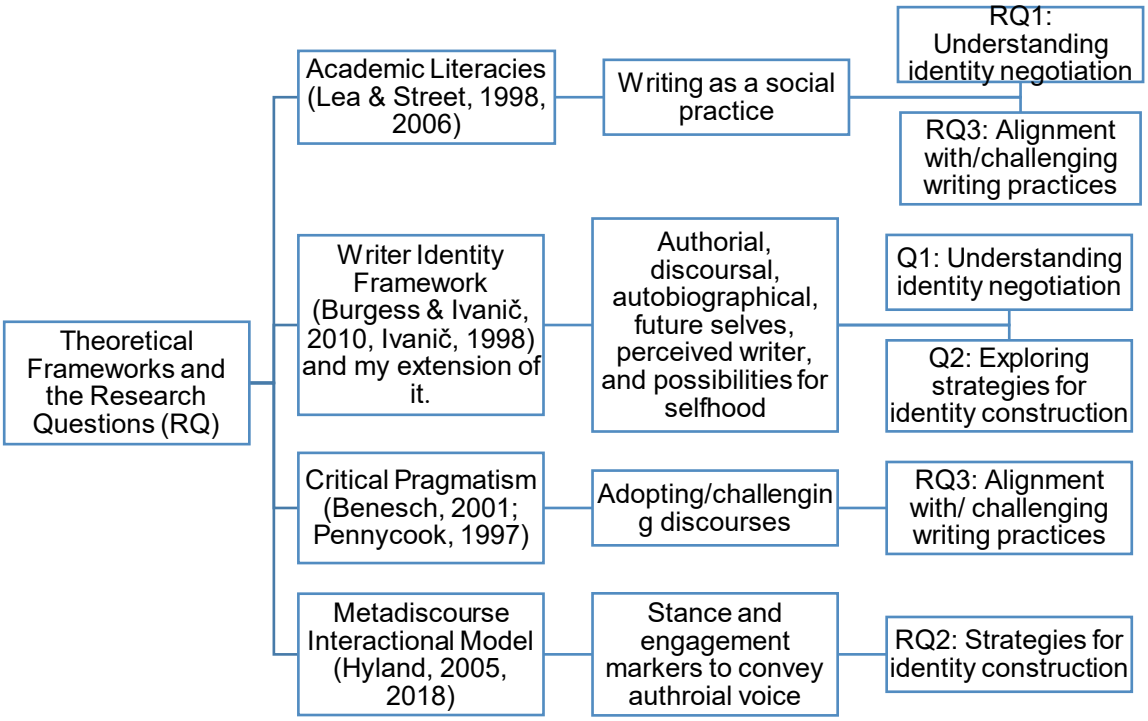


Figure 1. The Theoretical Frameworks and the Research Questions

understand whether graduate students are willing to contest the dominant academic discourses and to what extent they adopt a pragmatic stance in their writing development. This framework helped me understand the feasibility of applying the criticality that the Academic Literacies Approach calls for. These research questions will shed light on the experiences of graduate multilingual students in the Canadian higher education where multilingualism is a norm rather than an exception.

1.3. Multilingualism: A General Understanding and the Canadian Context

The understanding of multilingualism in society has shifted into a paradigm that views language as a social practice rather than as a discrete construct. In their review of this shift, Blommaert and Spotti (2017) tackle the emerging concept of superdiversity to describe this changing conceptualization of language. This concept encompasses the complex interplay of individual agency, social practices and identity construction within

diverse communities. It looks at the individual's linguistic repertoire as unstable and hybrid, rather than following a linear path of development.

Similarly, Cenoz (2013) discusses the new trend of viewing multilingualism from a "holistic rather than atomistic" perspective (p. 10). While the atomistic one views multilinguals as having fixed and discrete languages, the holistic understanding recognizes the broader complexity of the multilingual speaker's linguistic repertoire. To account for this shift, researchers have used other terminology for multilingualism, such as translanguaging (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011; García, 2009), hybridity (Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2013), code meshing (Canagarajah, 2006) and plurilingualism (Breidbach, 2003; Wright, 2000), with different epistemological stances. It is out of the scope of this study to discuss the differences among these terms, but they all share one common ground in acknowledging the many ways multilinguals employ their linguistic repertoire in different social contexts. In other words, multilinguals, unlike monolinguals, are viewed as having the ability to utilize different languages with different proficiency levels to meet their communication needs.

Despite the growing interest in multilingualism, researchers have not agreed on a single, conclusive definition. Coulmas (2018) examines this issue by presenting numerous dictionary and expert definitions of multilingualism. By contacting scholars in the field, she lists 20 definitions in different categories and concludes that "Multilingualism is a paradigm case of the messiness of social reality where clear-cut categories are in short supply" (p. 41). Cenoz (2013) states that the definitions presented in the field are relevant to different dimensions of multilingualism: bilingualism versus multilingualism, proficiency versus use and social versus individual.

However, my understanding of multilingualism aligns with the definition that is offered in Katsarova's (2022) report on language in the European Union: multilingualism refers to "the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives" (p. 2). This definition probably accounts for all dimensions and terms presented as it does not restrict the concept of multilingualism to either an individual level of proficiency or to its existence in society. It also resonates with the linguistic landscape in Canada, which is known for its multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Although the Canadian language policy still considers English and French as the only official languages in the country, the demographic makeup is changing dramatically. According to the 2021 census, 41.2% of Canadians reported speaking more than one language at home, compared to 39% in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2022), with 12% of Canadians speaking a language other than English or French. For example, the Punjabi and Hindi languages witnessed a 49% and 66% increase, respectively, between 2016 and 2021. The census attributes this growth in linguistic diversity levels to human mobility and immigration.

The increase in international students attending Canadian universities contributes to this linguistic variety. From the mid-2000s, the number of overseas students studying in Canada steadily increased, reaching 621,600 in 2021 (Crossman et al. 2022). In British Columbia, where International West University (a pseudonym for the institution where my participants were enrolled and hereafter referred to as IWU) is located, this growth is clearly visible. In 2024 for example, British Columbia's public and private post-secondary educational institutions hosted 217,600 international students (Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills, 2024).

However, a recent federal government policy aimed at restricting the issuance of study permits to international students had an impact on these high enrollment rates. In comparison to 2023 rates, the cap, which was put into effect in January 2024, reduced the number of international students coming to Canada by 40% (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2025). It is expected that the number of study permits for higher education students will be 437000 in Canada, with British Columbia to grant 53,589 permits. As for international graduate students, the number of permits will be 73,282, from which British Columbia will issue 20,053 (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2025). Despite this policy, these numbers still represent a significant proportion of the total student enrollments in Canadian higher education institutions.

1.4. Context of the Study

The study was carried out at International West University (IWU), a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality of the participants. IWU is a large publicly funded university located in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. It offers academic programs at

different levels, ranging from short courses to undergraduate and graduate programs. As for the graduate programs, IWU offers thesis-based and course-work-based degrees. These programs operate on a three-semester basis annually for both undergraduate and graduate students. Writing is the main component to successfully fulfill the requirements of the programs. Therefore, the university offers in-person and online writing support in the form of workshops, one-on-one consultations, videos as well as a writing foundation course which is primarily designed for undergraduate students. The foundation course is required if the applicant's literacy competency does not meet the university's admission requirements.

As the medium of instruction at IWU is English, all prospective international applicants to undergraduate programs, irrespective of nationality or citizenship status, are required to exhibit competency in the English language before admission. This competency includes the four skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. A proof of competency can be demonstrated through results during high school education or an English language proficiency exam. For prospective international graduate applicants whose primary language is not English, they must satisfy the language requirement by taking a recognized English-language proficiency exam, such as Academic IELTS (overall band of 7 with a minimum of 6.5 in each band), Paper-based TOEFL (a minimum of 850), or Pearson Academic (overall with a minimum of 60 in each band) among others. The test scores must not be more than two years old. However, graduate applicants who have completed an undergraduate program or higher at an institution where English was the medium of instruction and was in an English-speaking country are exempt from the test. Also, applicants to programs that are conducted entirely in French are not required to submit a proof of English language proficiency.

Written assignments are the main assessment tools to evaluate students' success at IWU. According to the university library website, some forms of academic writing common in different disciplines include, but are not limited to, literature reviews, abstracts, research papers, and critical analyses. The website provides links to resources for students to understand the differences and commonalities between these genres[1]. At the same time, it acknowledges that disciplinary and even instructor

[1] This thesis does not adopt genre as its primary analytical lens. It focuses on how students navigate their identities and dominant writing practices, irrespective of the genres of their produced texts.

expectations may vary with regards to each form. This demonstrates how writing is a social practice (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Ivanič, 1998; Lillis, 2001; Street & Lea, 1998, 2006) and how students need to navigate disciplinary practices to secure academic success (Hyland, 2005, 2018a, 2018b). So, I believe that IWU was a potentially valuable site to recruit participants and collect written assignments as a source of data for analysis.

1.5. Layout of the Study

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. Following Chapter One is Chapter Two in which I will review related literature to identity and academic writing. Throughout the chapter, I will discuss the main conceptual frameworks that I employed in my study: Burgess and Ivanič's (2010) framework, Hyland's (2005, 2018a) metadisourse model, Academic Literacies Approach (Street & Lea, 1998, 2006) and critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b; Cherryholmes, 1988; Pennycook, 1997). I will also discuss empirical studies and scholarly work relevant to graduate academic writing. Finally, I will narrow down my focus to graduate academic writing by discussing concepts and research on multilingual graduate student's academic writing in general and ending by analyzing scholarly work in the Canadian context.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss the research methodology and justify my methodological approach. I will also provide details of the participants and the documents they shared with me. Then, I will present details of the research methods (semi-structured interviews, written assignments, and assignment rubrics/guidelines) and the analytical approach I employed. Finally, I will conclude the chapter by discussing validity and ethical considerations.

Chapters Four, Five and Six will be dedicated to the analysis part of my research. In Chapter Four I will analyze the data that the instructor participants shared with me. I will divide the analysis in this chapter into three main themes: foregrounding academic voice, importance of scaffolded feedback, and need for other spaces for academic writing support. Chapter Five will concern the first set of data shared by student participants. I will analyze this set in light of two main themes: transition to graduate studies and identity projection and the burden of being a novice researcher. The second set of data shared by student participants will be analyzed in Chapter Six. I will divide my

analysis into main themes: mimicry as a pathway to belonging and feedback to provide room for voice.

In Chapter Seven, I will synthesize the findings and discuss how they address the research questions. I will also provide pedagogical implications that emerged from the research. Then, I will shed light on the limitations of my research and provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will lay the theoretical foundations for understanding academic writing identity, particularly for multilingual graduate students. I will start by shedding light on the conceptual shift of perceiving identity in applied linguistics. Then, I will examine the relationship between identity and academic writing by discussing Burgess and Ivanič's (2010) framework, Hyland's (2005, 2018a) metadisourse model, the effect of AI tools, and the relationship between identity and feedback. After that, I will outline the main tenets of the Academic Literacies Approach (Street & Lea, 1998, 2006) and discuss its tension with students' pragmatic needs from a critical pragmatism perspective (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b; Cherryholmes,1988; Pennycook, 1997). Lastly, I will narrow the focus to graduate academic writing, discussing the challenges faced by multilingual graduate students, the emerging research on supporting graduate writers, and limited research on graduate academic writing in the Canadian context.

2.2. A Constructionist View of Identity in Applied Linguistics

The conceptualization of identity has been central in social sciences, including applied linguistics. The critique that the essentialist view of identity received led to a change in understanding identity (Hall, 1996). Adopting post-structural/constructivist theoretical frameworks, researchers began to attribute a social dimension to the construct of identity as being negotiated, shaped and reshaped within discursive practices. This means that rather than being seen as fixed, identity started to be viewed as ongoing and negotiated within social structures (Block, 2006). One of the early non-essentialist perspectives on identity is Hall's (1996) which stated:

> identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and

> exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity - an 'identity' in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation) (p. 4).

The construction of identity in this sense takes place in social spaces where individuals attempt to represent themselves and at the same time are represented by others in institutional discourses (Jenkins, 2000).

The social turn in understanding identity led to a plethora of research by applied linguists to shed light on the relationship between language learning and identity in educational settings (e.g. Block, 2003, 2007; Breen, 2001; Morita, 2004; Norton, 1995, 1997; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Toohey, 2000). According to Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), practices of identity construction refer to “social, discursive, and narrative options offered by a particular society in a specific time and place to which individuals and groups of individuals appeal in an attempt to self-name, to self-characterize, and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives” (p. 19). Rather than being investigated through sociopsychological variables, the relationship between identity and language has been viewed from a social and cultural perspective where discursive identity construction takes place (Block, 2007, Morita, 2004). In this sense, research on identity offers a comprehensive and deeper understanding of how the social world influences a language learner’s identity formation as well as their access to the target language community (Norton, 2013)

In educational settings, the construct of identity in academic writing has been studied by many scholars (e.g. Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Hyland, 2012; Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Lillis, 2001; Matsuda, 2001; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007). Burgess and Ivanič (2010) define identity as “something that is not unitary or fixed but has multiple facets; is subject to tensions and contradictions; and is in a constant state of flux, varying from one time and one space to another (p. 232). Identity now is viewed as not only represented in textual features but also as tied to the academic discourse in which a written text was produced (Matsuda, 2015). It is tied to the literacy practices dominant in educational settings (Lea & Street, 2006). In this sense, the idea of academic discourse, which refers to the structured ways that create social categories and relationships, produce knowledge and maintain the existence of disciplines (Hyland, 2009), is significant in studying writer identity because the act of

writing requires the use of specific discursively existing resources and (non-) linguistic features (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010).

An important aspect of understanding identity in writing is the construct of voice (Matsuda, 2001, 2015). Matsuda (2001) defines authorial voice as “the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users choose, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available yet everchanging repertoire” (p. 40). This means that identity is a multifaceted construct that undergoes change and is socially constructed through the interactive dynamics of the socio-cultural context and discourse (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Lehman, 2020). Moreover, Matsuda’s (2001) understanding of authorial voice also indicates that authorial voice is a manifestation of authorial identity within the academic community.

Sperling and Appleman (2011) review different conceptualizations of voice in academic writing, shedding light on two perspectives from which voice is viewed: individualistic and socio-cultural. While the individualistic perspective refers to the writer’s linguistic and rhetorical choices to project their voice and act as insiders in the community (Hyland, 2015), the socio-cultural lens views voice as not only residing in the text, but also socially and culturally shaped in the contextualized nature of texts (Matsuda, 2015). As I view writing as a social practice (Street & Lea, 2006), my understanding of voice aligns with the second perspective because it involves understanding the voices that writers project through employing both linguistic and non-linguistic resources in their writing. These voices are

2.3. Identity and Academic Writing

2.3.1. Ivanič’s Writer Identity Framework

The increasing linguistic, social and cultural diversity in student populations in higher education means that students have different writing experiences and practices in their new academic environment. These experiences and practices contribute to identity construction in academic writing. Therefore, Academic Literacies proponents and other researchers have emphasized the vital importance of writer identity and voice in academic writing (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Hyland, 2008; 2012; Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Lehman, 2020; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007).

Authorial identity encompasses “the sorts of identities that are socially available in academic contexts, and the multiple selves that are constructed by writers’ selection of particular discoursal characteristics in the design of their texts” (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010, p. 235). Thus, writing is a site for constructing academic identity for which writers either employ available subject possibilities of selfhood to adopt and reproduce certain dominant conventions or challenge them (Ivanič, 1998).

One of the frameworks that I employed in my research to explore identity dynamics of the participants is Ivanič ‘s (1998) framework and its extended version (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010) of conceptualizing academic writer identity. This framework helped me explore how students negotiate their identities since it foregrounds their voice and investigates the discoursal factors influencing their academic participation in their communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1999). Ivanič (1998) explores more closely the available possibilities of selfhood of university student writers and how these possibilities are challenged and contested.

Adopting Foucault’s (1988) view of identity as the product of contestation and struggle in dominant discourses and the social-constructivist theory, Ivanič (1998) differentiates between *the autobiographical self, the discoursal self, the self as author*, and *possibilities of selfhood* as ways of conceiving of the identity of an adult student writer. *The autobiographical self* refers to the identity that writers bring with them. This sense of self is socially constructed and constantly evolving in response to their life experiences. *The discoursal self* is concerned with the impression that writers want to convey. Conveying this impression is influenced by discoursal characteristics inherent in a text. These characteristics involve values, beliefs and power dynamics in institutional discourses. *The self as author* is related to the idea of authorial voice and how far writers claim authority and to what extent they present themselves as authors. These aspects of writer identity function within *possibilities of selfhood* that are socially available to writers within a specific context. These possibilities are not equal, with some being privileged over others due to power dynamics and institutional norms. Ivanič argues that these aspects of identity are not mutually exclusive and cannot be entirely separated from each other when understanding the situatedness of academic writing.

Burgess and Ivanič (2010) add another aspect of writer’s identity: *the perceived writer*. This new aspect refers to the impression of the writer that the reader constructs

based on their reading of the text. The creation of this aspect of identity is iterative in the sense that it is repeatedly created during each individual act of reading by different readers. Moreover, the impression that a reader forms likely lasts over their lifespan and it exists as long as the reader is able to recall it. Furthermore, drawing on the idea of timescales and identity construction by Lemke (2000, cited Burgess & Ivanič, 2010), the authors emphasize the importance of viewing academic writer's identity construction within temporal dimensions: sociohistorical (centuries and years), ontogenetic (years, months), mesolevel (weeks, months, years), and microgenetic (seconds, minutes, hours) (see Table 1). First, the sociohistorical dimension refers to the persistence and change of identity categories in society over years and centuries. Second, student writers develop their distinctive identities over the ontogenetic temporal dimension (years and months). Third, the sociohistorical and ontogenetic identity categories are employed and shaped in mesolevel contexts, over weeks, months, and years. Fourth, the sociohistorical, the ontogenetical and the mesolevel dimensions only empirically exist moment-by-moment within a specific activity at the microgenetic level (seconds, minutes, hours) (Lemke 2000, cited Burgess & Ivanič, 2010)

These dimensions interact with each other during the process of writing as well as the act of reading a writer's work. For example, the discoursal and authorial selves, which are constructed at the microgenetic level, are influenced, though not determined, by the autobiographical self, which operates at the ontogenetic level. In other words, the discoursal and authorial selves are constructed in particular acts of writing through drawing on the autobiographical self. At the same time, the authorial self is a dimension of the discoursal self which both add resources to the writer's dynamic repertoire of writing practices (or to the autobiographical self). The socially available possibilities of selfhood, which are constructed at the sociohistorical, the mesolevel as well as the microgenetic level, interact with the autobiographical self through the writer's selective incorporation of those possibilities in their writing.

While Burgess and Ivanič (2010) provide a valuable framework to understand how academic writers construct their identities, I believe that adding a *future writer self* as another aspect of writer's identity would provide a more nuanced understanding to the dynamic nature of its construction (see Table 1). It would suggest that the construction of academic writing identity is not necessarily about the present self only, but also how a student writer envisions their future academic self. It represents the

writer's future aspirations for development as a legitimate academic writer. This aspect of the writer's identity may influence and be influenced by the autobiographical self. In other words, their past experiences of doing writing can contribute to their future self which at the same time can inform their decision on which resources to incorporate into their repertoire of writing practices.

Table 1. The Existence of Aspects of Writer Identity on Different Timescales

	Aspects of writer identity					
	Socially available possibilities for selfhood	**Autobiographical self**	**Discoursal self**	**Authorial self**	**Perceived writer**	**Future writer self**
Time scales	Relevance of timescales to each aspect of writer identity					
Sociocultural time (Decades, centuries)	Persist and change over sociocultural time					
Ontogenetic time (Months, years)		Exists within the lifespan of each individual			Persists over the lifetime of the reader(s)	Shaped over the lifetime of the writer
Mesolevel time reader(s) (Weeks, months, years)	Adopted and adapted in mesolevel time	Develops and changes in mesolevel time				
Microgenetic time (Seconds, minutes, hours)	Exist empirically in particular acts of writing and reading		Constructed in particular acts of writing		Constructed in particular acts of reading	Envisioned and constructed in particular acts of writing

Note. I adapted this table from Burgess and Ivanič's (2010) by adding the seventh column.

Furthermore, the future writer self operates at the mesolevel and microgenetic levels. It is shaped within the lifespan of the writer by their interaction in academic discourse and their specific moment of writing. For example, a student writer might aspire to become an academic researcher. This envisioned self can motivate them to be familiar with the disciplinary resources and practices and develop their authorial and discoursal selves, following the conventions of the academic community they have

joined or would like to gain access to. They act on constructing their future writer self within the socially available possibilities of selfhood held out by the academic discourse. They may, however, change their aspirations for a future self if they can take up other possibilities of selfhood that become available in the academic discourse.

2.3.2. Hyland's Metadiscourse Interactional Model

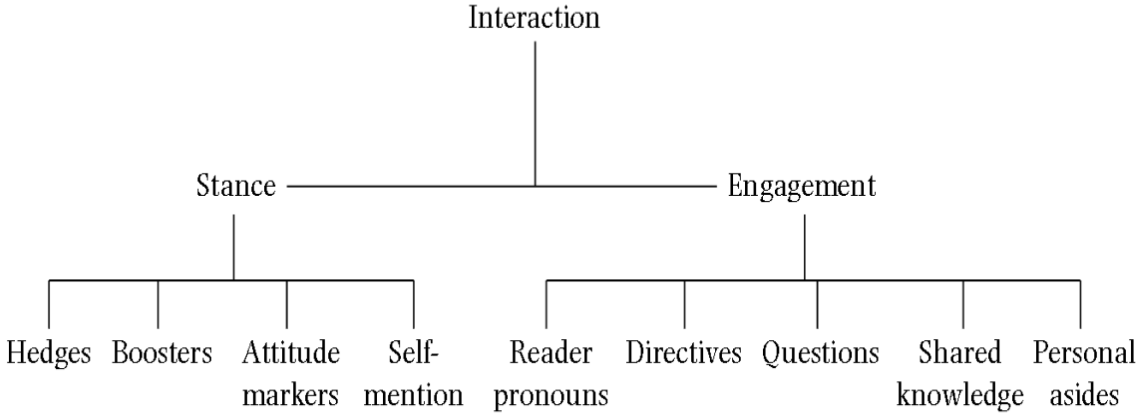
While Burgess and Ivanič (2010) focus on the contextual factors in constructing academic writer identity, Hyland (2005, 2018b) highlights the relationship between the rhetorical features of produced texts and developing that identity in academic discourse. He emphasizes the relationship between the writer and their stance in discourse on the one hand and their adherence to the academic conventions and norms in that discourse on the other (Hyland, 2017). This relationship represents a metadiscourse interaction between the writer and the reader through interpersonal resources employed in the written text (Hyland, 2005, 2018b, 2023). Metadiscourse refers to

> the commentary on a text made by its producer in the course of speaking or writing. This commentary allows writers to guide, direct, and interact with their readers and demonstrate a concern for their ability to understand a text as it is intended. It assists them to recognize the writer's stance, see connections between ideas, and feel involved in what is being said (Hyland, 2023, p. 59).

To understand this interaction, Hyland (2005, 2018a) proposes an interpersonal model of metadiscourse that comprises two dimensions of writer-reader interaction: *interactional* and *interactive*. In my research, I only employed the interactional dimension as it directly concerns the writer's voice and strategies employed to project the authorial voice. The interactive one is out of the scope of my study as it refers to the resources that writers use to organize their texts and guide their readers to understand them.

Hyland (2002, 2005, 2018b) stresses the importance of authorial voice and how it is manifested in academic texts through what he calls "interaction in academic discourse" (Hyland, 2005). Hyland (2005, 2018b) argues that an interactional model comprises key resources which academic writers employ for adopting an authorial voice and performing the role of disciplinary insiders. This model involves *stance* and *engagement* strategies to achieve academic communication, develop arguments and establish academic disciplinary identities (see Figure 2). *Stance* refers to the ways that

writers present themselves as academic insiders and convey their voice, affective judgements, attitudes and arguments. *Stance* includes hedges (e.g. might; possibly), boosters (e.g. clearly; obviously), attitude markers (e,g. unfortunately; remarkable; agree), and self-mention techniques (e.g. first-person pronoun). Therefore, there is a strong link between authorial voice and the development of arguments (Abasi & Graves, 2008), a relationship that may pose a challenge to many multilingual writers due to dominant academic conventions and the cultural practices of argumentation that students bring with them (Hyland, 2002). *Engagement* (Hyland, 2005), on the other hand, concerns the rhetorical resources, such as reader pronouns or directives, that writers draw on to address and engage their readers with the arguments they attempt to



establish.

Figure 2. Key Resources for Academic Interaction
Source: Hyland (2005, p.177)

However, understanding academic writer identity necessitates a broader perspective. While Hyland's framework model offers valuable insights into the relationship between linguistic and rhetorical features of academic writing, other discoursal characteristics play a role in constructing academic writer's identities. Feedback and assessment descriptions (Baker, 2017; Casanave, 2002; Lehman, 2020; Lilis, 2001) and the gap between students' and instructor's expectations (Bastalich et al., 2014; Lea, 2004; Street & Lea, 1998, 2006) may influence positively or negatively the possibilities for students to project their stance or engagement in writing since developing an academic writing identity is influenced by the options that disciplinary

fields offer to writers (Hyland, 2008) (See Section 5.2 for more details on the relationship between feedback and identity).

2.3.3. AI Language Models as a Strategy and Academic Writing

The sudden emergence of generative language models (AI) adds another layer in researching academic writer identity. Models, such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Grammarly, have brought forward scholarly discussions on their potential benefits and challenges in higher education in general (Chan, 2023; Farrelly & Baker, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023; Sevnarayan & Potter, 2024) and in academic writing in particular (Anson, 2024; Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024; Lingard, 2023; Mahapatra, 2024; Maphoto, 2024; Semrl et al., 2023; Warschauer et al., 2023). This emergence has caused mixed opinions on the inclusion of such models in academia. For example, the concern of academic integrity has led some prestigious universities in the UK to ban the use of AI language models in academic assignments and consider their use as academic dishonesty (Chan, 2023) while an ethical concern was raised in Liang et al.'s (2023) study in which they found that AI detectors tend to falsely classify written texts produced by international student writers as being AI generated. Moreover, regardless of their writing proficiency level, multilingual writers may become more susceptible to accusations of plagiarism by their instructors (Warschauer et al., 2023). Another concern is the possible negative impact on students' critical thinking as they may tend to heavily rely on the acquisition of information from those models (Kasneci et al., 2023). This may hinder the construction of students' own identities and could obscure their academic voices in their academic writing.

In dialogue with Lea and Street's (1998) Academic Literacies framework, which is employed in this study, Anson (2024) analyzes the impact of AI on the three levels of literacy development—study skills, socialization and academic literacies. Anson argues that AI may have different degrees of negative impact on those levels. The study skills level seems to be the least likely to be influenced negatively as AI tools can be helpful in proofreading and identifying grammatical errors; regarding the academic literacies level, if instructors provide guidance on the disciplinary nuances of students' texts which have been transformed by AI, then the negative impact of those tools may be mitigated. Accordingly, instructors should guide students using AI tools to learn the know-how strategies to navigate their disciplinary voices and understand specific expectations of

writing conventions within their disciplines. Lastly, the AI language models may pose the highest risk to the socialization level as they may hinder students from synthesizing ideas or developing their arguments during their first round of drafting or reading. Anson suggests that students, especially first-year undergraduates, should first critically engage with academic texts and learn how to develop their arguments. In other words, they should first be acculturated into the academic conventions before integrating those models into their learning.

To increase the benefits and alleviate the challenges of using AI, Warschauer et al. (2023), for example, stress the importance of digital literacies and propose a framework of five key elements to write *with* AI writing tools. First, students need to understand the potential affordances and limitations of AI. Second, they need to know how to navigate its functions and identify the most suitable aspects that address their needs. Third, they need to learn how to craft effective prompts that yield useful results. Fourth, they need to check the accuracy of the generated content. Fifth, they need to deal with the information acquired ethically through incorporating it in their writing and disclosing their use of AI.

Moreover, in their systematic literature review to identify the domain where AI models can be integrated in researching writing, Khalifa & Albadawy (2024) conclude that the integration of those AI language models in academic writing and research has the potential to significantly improve the quality and readability of academic writing. AI tools would also increase the opportunity for writers to overcome the barriers of publishing, especially for multilingual students through being a promising tool in summarizing and proofreading (Semrle et al., 2023). However, similar to Warschauer et al. (2023), Khalifa & Albadawy (2024) emphasize the pressing need for training and the importance of being cautious when using such models to avoid overshadowing the writer's critical thinking and creativity. So, if used critically, the AI language models can be significant and strategic tools in empowering multilingual writers to participate in the academic discourse of their fields. Such tools can also boost students' confidence as academic writers by providing personalized feedback and facilitate the composition of their writing. In other words, they can act as a personal instructor whose feedback might carry less emotional burden than that given by students' instructors.

2.3.4. Assessment, Feedback and Identity

Feedback can have an impact on students' confidence as learners (Winstone & Carless, 2019) and in effect may influence their writer identities. Baker (2017) claims that assessment forms a principal challenge for students to adapt to the academic environment. Baker further suggests that assessment and feedback contribute to the perpetuation of an assessment discourse that limits originality and creativity. The strong emphasis on summative written assessment as being the criterion for evaluating students' success and achievement neglects the complex nature of students' academic writing development (French, 2018). Similarly, Beaumont et al. (2011) report in their study of first-year university students that the prevalence of summative post-submission feedback and the discrepancy between the students' prior feedback experiences and the new feedback discourse do not contribute to the effective development of academic writing.

Furthermore, Lea and Street (1998) reveal through interviews with students and their instructors that the issue with feedback is epistemological in the sense that the instructors hold different epistemological understandings of argument than those of their students. They also argue that the lack of mitigation and use of assertion in feedback comments enforce instructors' power and authority, which can have significant impact on students' development of their writer identities. This is because of the influential nature of texts on peoples' perceptions of the material world, their actions and social interactions (Fairclough, 2003). Similarly, the findings of Weaver's (2006) study which explored university students' perceptions of feedback revealed a discouraging lack of positive feedback and showed a need for a balanced approach between negative and positive comments.

From the perspective of Academic Literacies, Sutton (2012) posits that to effectively engage students with feedback, instructors should consider three feedback dimensions: epistemological, ontological and practical. First, the epistemological dimension focuses not only on how students' knowledge is valued but also on how to improve their knowledge and their representation of it. Second, the ontological dimension concerns the potential of feedback to build students' confidence and sense of being as academic writers. Third, the practical dimension refers to the explicit guidance for students on how to use feedback for improvement. These dimensions inform a

dialogic approach to feedback (Sutton, 2009) which is viewed as an ongoing interactive and social practice, unlike the dominant monologic one (Nicol, 2014; Price et al., 2011; Tuck, 2012; Winstone & Carless, 2019). Sutton (2012) proposes those dimensions in response to the deficiencies in the type of feedback that stems from the skills and socialization approaches: the skills approach is a reductionist one that focuses on fixing skills while the socialization approach presumes students' ability to acculturate into the academic discourse despite disciplinary nuances in academic writing. Hence, the significance of Academic Literacies in accounting for the epistemological, ontological as well as the practical dimensions of feedback.

Therefore, researchers have stressed the importance of a paradigmatic shift towards feedback that is dialogic in nature, emanating from a constructivist perspective (Lillis, 2001; Nicol, 2010; Winstone & Carless, 2019). Winstone and Carless (2019) argue that assessment designs and feedback that are based on one-way provision of information disengage students and limit their agentive writing practices. This traditional type of feedback where instructors provide written feedback without much opportunity for dialogue is often perceived by students as unclear and impersonal (Nicol, 2014). Moving beyond traditional feedback models requires considering feedback as a social practice that involves students' agentic involvement through reciprocity and scaffolding in an assessment-as-learning process (Wang & Lee, 2021). That is, dialogic feedback makes instructors' expectations explicit and allows students to understand disciplinary conventions and build their academic writing identities.

2.4. Academic Writing as a Challenge from the Perspective of Academic Literacies

Research has revealed that international multilingual students studying at Western universities face a variety of challenges while adapting to higher education discourses (Bartram, 2007; Lacina, 2002; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Zhou et al., 2008). Among these challenges is academic writing as being an integral key for academic success in higher education. The Academic Literacies Approach, championed by Street and Lea (1998, 2006), offers valuable insights into the understanding of the difficulties that international students need to overcome throughout their academic journey. This approach dismisses the transparency and neutrality of academic writing and views it as deeply entangled with dominant institutional practices and ideologies (Lillis, 2001; Street

& Lea, 1998, 2006). These practices are representative of an “institutional practice of mystery” (Lillis, 2001, p. 14).

Based on New Literacies Studies, the Academic Literacies Approach views writing from a broader perspective. Lea and Street (1998, 2006) point out that research into academic writing in higher education has been informed by two main models: a skills model and a socialization model. First, the skills model is based on the notion that learning academic writing is a process of acquiring surface linguistic features, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling, in order to master academic writing. This model presupposes that student writers are deficient until they learn some generic features. Lillis (2011) contends that the skills model assumes that writing is an individual act performed by socially neutral subjects who employ universally transferable linguistic features. It also limits the scope of understanding the nature of language and communication as well as the understanding of the challenges student writers face.

The second model identified by Lea and Street (1998, 2006) is the socialization model which concerns the acquisition of taken-for-granted disciplinary genres and textual conventions as a primary goal for students to be acculturated into the academic discourse. It is based on the realization that language is a transparent mode of reflecting disciplinary knowledge, rather than constructing it. Moreover, this model tends to enforce the notion that the academic community is a homogeneous one in which students need to learn its universal practices and norms. So, the objective is the mastery of academic discourse, a goal which reflects a pragmatic attitude adopted by EAP (English for Academic Purposes) scholars who prioritize students’ acculturation over critiquing discoursal issues (Canagarajah, 2002).

Therefore, Lea and Street (1998, 2006) suggest a third model which they referred to as academic literacies. This model takes into account the contested nature of academic writing and foregrounds the positions and identities that students bring in and construct as academic writers. Furthermore, it views academic writing as a process of meaning-making that involves affective, social and ideological factors. The three models are not mutually exclusive, with the academic literacies model being the umbrella that incorporates the other two models. In order to understand this multi-faceted nature of student writing within institutional discourses, the work of Academic Literacies turns the gaze on academic institutions, puts the voices and perceptions of student writers as its

primary focus and attempts to theorize students' writing practices and the ways universities can provide support to these practices (Aiken, 2021).

The shift to understanding writing as a social practice provides a venue for exploring the complex process of text production. Lilis (2001) draws a distinction between the approach that views writing as a discrete skill and the one that views it as a social practice. Her argument is that it is necessary to move away from conceptualizing writing as an individual act performed by neutral subjects who attempt to learn the skills of producing appropriate texts. At the same time, she argues that writing is a socially and institutionally situated practice that falls within the contested nature of academic conventions. From a postcolonial perspective, Thesen (2014) views this contestation as a "tension between pulls towards convention (centripetal forces) and pushes away from the center and towards more hybrid, experimental and open forms (centrifugal forces)" (p. 6). In other words, the contestation refers to students' attempts to find "tilting point" between contextual factors, such as beliefs, values, forms, relationships and the reader, on one hand, and the self, on the other (Thesen, 2014, p. 15). From an Academic Literacies perspective, Aiken (2021) sees the centripetal forces as referring to students' attempts to meet the academic expectations of their institutions while the centrifugal forces involve students' resistance to comply with academic writing conventions to project their voice.

Instructors, in this sense, should not only make the implicit disciplinary conventions explicit, but also encourage students to have a critical view of these contextualized conventions (Wingate, 2012) to promote a transformative pedagogical stance that shifts away from the uncritical induction into academic discourses (Lillis & Scott, 2007). Clarence and McKenna (2017) contend that developing students' academic literacies requires knowing the nuances of disciplinary knowledge and how this knowledge is produced, disseminated and critiqued. This could be achieved through a pedagogy based on principles that recognize students' backgrounds and identities and incorporate them in learning materials (Lea, 2004) that provide venues for students to challenge dominant literacy practices (Lillis, 2006).

2.5. Academic Literacies: From Theory to Pedagogical Practice

Developing academic writing should go beyond making the invisible explicit or focusing on criticality. It should also involve instructing students on how they can use academic conventions and ways of constructing knowledge to represent and produce their own meanings (English, 1999). The Academic Literacies Approach fosters a culture of dialogue between students and their instructors about their writing experiences. This includes sharing constructive feedback and exploring new ways of meaning-making in their disciplines (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006). This dialogue, according to Lillis (2003), gives the opportunity to students to negotiate their desires for meaning making and their own ways of knowledge construction. It takes place between the individual student and their instructors, aiming at acquainting students with the relevant conventions and raising their language awareness (Lillis, 2006). It also ensures that the students are given the opportunity to express their own intentions and feelings about existing practices.

These suggestions are tackled by what Lillis and Scott (2007) identify as two primary methods to teaching academic writing: normative and transformative. The basic tenets of academic writing are called into question by transformative techniques, which raise issues of what constitutes acceptable writing and what can be written. Therefore, researchers have stressed the importance of incorporating the Academic Literacies framework into disciplinary courses (e.g. Elton 2010; English, 2015; French 2018; Howitt et al, 2024; Lea 2004; Lea and Street 1998, 2006; Maldoni, 2017; Olsson et al, 2021; Wingate et al., 2011) to move from critique to practice (Lillis, 2003). I will review some studies that employed Academic Literacies as a lens to gain insights into the success and challenges of implementing it.

Informed by the tenets of Academic Literacies, English (2015), in her study, assigns students to regenre their essays using unconventional forms such as plays or journalism. This goes beyond teaching the students what genres are; instead, it examines how genres can shape thinking and knowledge production. In other words, giving students the opportunity to utilize different genres in their writing allows them to have a deeper engagement with the subject matter and adopt a critical perspective as well as construct their academic identities. According to English, this method transforms students from passive information consumers into active knowledge producers.

Lea (2004) also provides recommendations on how to incorporate Academic Literacies concepts into curriculum design. For example, she included an element of critique in the texts used in an online course at the Open University. This element helped students recognize that knowledge is constructed rather than merely represented through writing and it alerted them to potential differences between previous writing practices and those required at university. Lea, however, concedes that institutional assessment procedures may make it more difficult to incorporate the Academic Literacies principles into course design.

Other researchers have attempted to bring the Academic Literacies principles into practice and provided pedagogical recommendations. In their study, Wingate et al. (2011), for example, recommend an embedded approach to Academic Literacies in subject curriculum. The researchers carried out a writing intervention based on the Academic Literacies principles in an applied linguistics program at a UK university. Using interviews, classroom notes and text analysis of students' writing, the researchers argue that the intervention was effective in unveiling academic conventions through feedback and dialogue (Lillis, 2006). Moreover, based on text-based evaluation and assessment feedback over time, Wingate et al (2011) found out that some students had improved their academic writing. Most importantly, they contend that this approach did not jeopardize the teaching of subject content. However, they admit that embedding Academic Literacies in academic courses may be time consuming and add more workload on the part of instructors.

Another study was conducted by university lecturers in Sweden, Olsson et al. (2021), who attempted to embed Academic Literacies into their disciplinary courses to provide implications from practitioners' perspectives rather than from education researchers. The lecturers argue that through employing formative feedback, explicit and empathetic instruction, instruction, peer assessment and journaling, they were able to meet their students' academic needs. Nonetheless, time was the most formidable challenge they faced as translating Academic Literacies into practice required tremendous effort and time. Moreover, the consistency of evaluating students' writing was not guaranteed despite the researchers' efforts to address that challenge in different ways, such as analyzing exemplary essays and making explicit the assessment criteria to students as well as involving subject lecturers. This study aligns with Wingate and

Tribble's (2012) call for involving subject lecturers in integrating Academic Literacies into the curriculum in order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of academic writing.

Engaging subject instructors in the application of Academic Literacies is also supported by other studies (Clarence & Mcckenna, 2017; French, 2018; Jacobs, 2005; Ticha et al., 2024). Clarence and McKenna (2017) argue that work employing an Academic Literacies lens tends to conflate disciplinary writing practices with the disciplinary knowledge structures from which those practices originate. The researchers contend that it is important to understand how a specific academic subject organizes knowledge and ways of thinking specific to that subject in order to justify certain value-laden writing practices. The understanding of those structures can be achieved through the involvement of both subject instructors (the insiders) and academic literacy practitioners (the outsiders) in a collaborative work as also argued by Jacobs (2005). This can make clear the disciplinary tacit ways of knowing to the practitioners, help the instructors have a critical view on their assessment demands of their students and eventually achieve the Academic Literacies' transformative goal (Lillis & Scott, 2007).

Based on the main tenets of Academic Literacies, which gives privilege to practice over text (Lillis & Scott, 2007), French (2018) challenges the deficit construct in academic writing teaching. She proposes an alternative approach for teaching academic writing to first year undergraduate students: "Fail Better." This approach acknowledges that learning academic writing is an ongoing process in which failure is a necessary part of the journey. According to French, the role of subject lecturers is to openly acknowledge their own struggles as writers and engage with discussions about the challenges of academic writing. This could be achieved through building a writing community in which students share their drafts with each other and their instructors so that they become aware of their academic writing development. Thus, the students may experience failing to gradually build writing confidence. I believe that this approach can be applied not only at the undergraduate level, but also graduate level. The presumption that graduate students have mastered academic writing (Simpson, 2016) is not always accurate, necessitating a pedagogical approach that extends the Academic Literacies framework to include graduate students (Lea, 2016).

2.6. Academic Literacies and Critical Pragmatism: An Issue of Criticality

The main feature of Academic Literacies is to adopt a critical lens on existing writing instruction and conventional approaches to student academic writing (Lillis, 2006). Proponents of this approach have criticized the focus on disciplinary texts as being central to inducting students into their new academic culture, a process that Lea and Street (1998) encapsulated in their *socialization model*. According to them, this process came as a reaction to the "crudity and insensitivity" of the study skills approach (p. 159). The emphasis on text rather than practice leads to textually biased pedagogies that do not view academic writing as a social practice, do not engage with the complexities of cultural and institutional contexts, and tend to normalize the institutional practices as the only meaning-making resources (Lillis & Scott, 2007). Therefore, the Academic Literacies Approach considers other widely adopted approaches, such as EAP, as inadequate to teaching academic writing (Williams, 2019; Wingate & Tribble, 2012) as they may not address students' identity issues and may conflict with their prior literacy experiences (Lea & Street, 2006). In other words, EAP could be seen as a pragmatic approach that aims at unquestionably fitting all students into academic discourses.

Lillis and Tuck (2016) outline the key discrepancies between EAP and Academic Literacies and one of the primary differences is the tendency of EAP to normalize academic conventions while Academic Literacies aims to contest them and make them explicit. That is, Academic Literacies shifts the focus from prescriptive, objective, normalized standards of academic writing to students' agency, personal experiences and sociocultural backgrounds. For example, Williams (2019) argues that from the perspective of Academic Literacies, reflective writing is considered a type of writing that develops students' authentic voice because it depends on students' personal experience and subjectivity. In contrast, he argues EAP, which encourages objectivity and disengagement from emotions, may not consider it an academic genre. However, Wingate (2012) argues that Academic Literacies approach seems to neglect all pedagogic contributions of EAP, which may converge with the main principles of Academic Literacies (Wingate & Tribble 2012). In addition, Hyland (2018a) views that the criticism levelled at EAP is outdated since this approach has adopted a critical turn and moved beyond considering writing as a process of skill learning.

Inspired by the work of Pennycook (1997) and Benesch (2001a), Harwood and Hadley (2004) attempt to highlight three different EAP approaches to academic writing: Pragmatic EAP, Critical EAP, and Critical Pragmatic EAP (see Figure 3). Pragmatic EAP is an instrumental approach that is concerned with developing the students' writing skills and inducting them into the dominant value-free academic conventions. It requires students to adapt their writing practices to the institutional ones. Critical EAP came as a response to this approach. Its aim is to transform students from being passive learners of academic discourses into active participants who challenge fixed academic writing practices. It criticizes the first approach as being an ideological perspective (Pennycook, 1997) that seeks to fit students into prevailing structures and denies their identities and voices in dominant cultural frameworks (Allison, 1996). Critical EAP was influenced by critical pedagogy which:

> remind[s] us of the difficulty many multilingual speakers have when they try to follow Anglo-American discourse norms, and it forces us to question the underlying assumption of pragmatism that every student should follow, and should wish to follow, these same norms (Harwood & Hadley, 2004, p. 366)

However, Harwood and Hadley (2004) criticize critical EAP for lacking pedagogical applications and failing to offer alternative teaching practices.

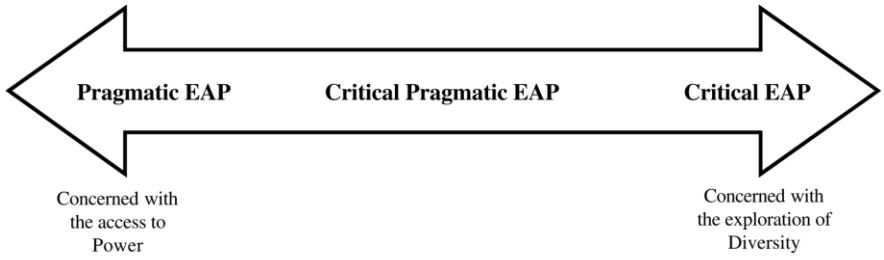


Figure 3. Pragmatic EAP, Critical Pragmatic EAP, Critical EAP
Source: Harwood and Hadley (2004, p. 358)

Given the discrepancies between both approaches, Benesch (2001a, 2001b) and Harwood and Hadley (2004) call for a reconciliatory third approach: critical pragmatic EAP. It attempts to have a balanced perspective between the first two approaches. It seeks to move away from "vulgar pragmatism" to "critical pragmatism" (Pennycook, 1997), terms that were first introduced by Cherryholmes (1988). According to Cherryholmes (1988), vulgar pragmatism derives from the concept of "unreflective acceptance of explicit and implicit standards, conventions, rules, and discourse-practices

that we find around us" (p. 151). Meanwhile critical pragmatism acknowledges that students need to learn academic conventions but emphasizes that students have the choice to adopt or contest them "when a sense of crisis … brought to our choices, when it is accepted that our standards, beliefs, values, guiding texts, and discourse-practices themselves require evaluation and reappraisal" (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 151). Harwood and Hadley (2004) state "a Critical Pragmatic pedagogy will combine the restive questioning of Critical EAP (while avoiding its more reactionary elements), with the focus on dominant discourse norms which a pragmatic approach stresses" (p. 366). Benesch (2001a) also contends that critical pragmatism "encourages students to assess their options in particular situations rather than assuming they must fulfil expectations" (p. 64). In other words, a writing class might be a site for creating a third space (Bhabha, 1994) to negotiate identities, based on the particularities of the context as well as the students' goals (Benesch, 2001b).

The emergence of critical EAP informed Wingate and Tribble's (2012) call for a reconciliation between EAP and Academic Literacies. The authors believe that both approaches now have a common ground and may provide valuable contributions to the teaching of academic writing. The Academic Literacies approach offers insights into the broader social and contextual factors that influence writing and identity while EAP can provide a framework for understanding academic writing conventions. This synergy involves more collaborative teaching between subject instructors and EAP facilitators to examine issues of discursive power dynamics. "Ultimately it is these local contexts, rather than universal narratives, which define what EAP is, how it is taught, and the potential it has to improve the lives of those who study it" (Hyland, 2018a, p. 396).

In their study, Morton et al. (2015) attempted to explore multilingual students' perceptions of academic writing in English. The researchers found significant variations in students' interpretations of engaging in academic writing, including whether they viewed it as acquiring mere writing skills, negotiating identities or developing interpersonal relations. This means that students, for example, may hold a pragmatic perspective on academic writing and they expect that learning is achieved through learning certain skills and conventions (Canton et al, 2017; Ruecker & Shapiro, 2020). In other words, students may resist taking a critical stance on academic writing discourses (Flowerdew, 2020; Wingate, 2012). Similarly, based on Thesen's (2014) concept of the "tilting point" between centripetal and centrifugal forces, Aiken (2021) found out that

students conformed to the academic expectations (centripetal forces) to gain good grades although they had a desire to express their own understandings of disciplinary knowledge and use their own meaning-making practices (centrifugal forces).

The argument made by Academic Literacies proponents to challenge textual bias and academic norms does not seem to be easily applied. In her attempt to identify the most effective approaches to academic writing in a UK university, Wingate (2012) designed three initiatives. Two of them were based on Academic Literacies principles of critiquing institutional discourses and avoiding textual bias. The researcher found out that students demonstrated a strong willingness to learn from the text and expressed limited desire to critique established conventions. Therefore, she concluded that for novice writers, critical awareness should not be the primary focus of academic writing pedagogy, but rather textual analysis should be the core of writing instruction to understand academic conventions, which can be challenged at a later stage.

Moreover, Lillis and Tuck (2016) admit that implementing criticality may be easier at graduate level. This is because applying critical pedagogies is contextual and depends on educational constraints. Whilst they do not specify the nature of these constraints, I argue that one of them is the need for novice writers to learn the disciplinary practices before delving into contesting them. Another constraint could be the negative consequences that students might face if they challenge writing norms. This was clearly indicated in Harwood and Hadly's (2004) study on the effectiveness of applying critical pragmatic EAP approach regarding the use personal pronouns and possessive adjectives at the graduate level. The researchers argue that adopting a critical pragmatic EAP approach with a corpus-based approach in graduate courses may circumvent the challenges associated with critical and pragmatic EAP approaches. Nonetheless, they warn against possible negative outcomes that students may face when challenging academic practices. One of these challenges might be academic failure if students do not adopt academic disciplinary norms. Therefore, the principle of criticality should not be unreflectively applied in academic settings.

Moreover, as Hyland (2012) argues, learning academic conventions "admits [students] into new communities and experiences, offering different ways of understanding the world through abstraction and precision" (p. 196). Therefore, I contend that it is unrealistic to focus on criticality at the expense of jeopardizing

multilingual students' futures. This is because students may hold an instrumental perspective on adopting dominant practices to ensure academic success or to secure an opportunity for academic publication. In addition, many higher education institutions around the world demand English to be the language used in academic writing (Hyland, 2016). Multilingual university students as well as researchers need to master the standardized conventions of academic English writing to secure academic success and understand their disciplines (Hyland, 2018a), especially that those standardized conventions are still the norm rather than the exception. This situation has put graduate students, as novice researchers and, possibly, future academics, under increasing pressure to publish in English (Flowerdew, 2020).

For some graduate students, it is of vital importance to acquire the dominant practices of academic writing as their future "career opportunities [are] increasingly tied to an ability to gain acceptance for their work in high profile journals indexed in the Web of Knowledge SCI databases and usually published in English" (Hyland, 2016). To emphasize this, Flowerdew (2007) highlighted the challenges encountered by a young multilingual scholar to publish in a highly ranked English-medium journal. The scholar was a newly appointed assistant professor at a Hong Kong university, which stipulates obtaining publication for contract renewal. The several rejections the scholar received from journals was mainly due to the lack of knowledge of the English rhetorical conventions adopted in his discipline. Therefore, Flowerdew concluded from the study that a critical pragmatic approach to academic writing could be a "midway" between critiquing academic conventions and learning them to obtain academic success.

2.7. Graduate Academic Writing

2.7.1. Academic Writing and the Multilingual Graduate Student

Most research on academic writing within the framework of Academic Literacies has been conducted at the undergraduate level whereas the graduate level has not received as much focus (Fergie et al., 2011; Lea, 2012; McKenna, 2004). Moreover, writing support for students at this level is not well documented, nor are their writing experiences extensively explored despite the recent growing interest in researching graduate academic writing (Furneaux, 2018; Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Henderson & Cook, 2020). I believe that academic writing in graduate-level contexts needs more

attention from researchers because the academic demands involve a greater emphasis on depth and breadth of knowledge as well as the synthesis of new ideas and reconciling conflicting perspectives rather than just reporting or merely summarizing conflicting perspectives (Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007; Lawrence & Zawacki, 2019). Moreover, research and writing skills are only foundational elements, which students need to familiarize themselves with within the cultural, linguistic, academic and social milieu of their new academic environment (Braine, 2002; Sharma, 2018).

For international multilingual graduate students, academic writing poses a great challenge in contexts where deficit construction is dominant. Due to grammatical errors or inadequate research skills, those students may be perceived as language or research deficient; therefore, programs or workshops are recommended for them to provide transferable and generalizable standards of good academic writing (Bastalich et al., 2014). This approach does not recognize the cultural and social complexities of producing written texts as well as the students' already existing academic writing practices. For example, compared to Western academic conventions, some Asian cultures prioritize writer-oriented texts, giving less importance to transitions that are employed in Western norms to facilitate the understanding of the reader (Leki & Carson, 1997). Another issue that this approach attempts to address is related to the common belief that graduate students need to be trained to have a voice as per Western standards. At the same time, this belief does not view them as having developed well-established identities with pre-existing voices in their native languages (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001) or as possessing rhetorical resources for developing arguments and claims different from those recognized in Western academic discourses (Hyland, 2002)

Despite the limited research on academic writing at the graduate level compared to undergraduate, some research has focused on understanding the issues and complexities that graduate student writers experience (e.g. Abasi et al., 2006; Casanave & Li, 2008; Calle-Arango & Ávila Reyes, 2023; Erling and Bartlett, 2008; Lea, 2004; Locke & Boyle, 2016; Sharma, 2018; Wang et al., 2024) with others proposing forms of writing support (e.g. Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Lawrence & Zawacki, 2019; Sharma, 2018; Simpson, 2012; Simpson et al. 2016). One of the remarkable endeavours is an edited book *Learning the Literacy Practices of Graduate School* by Casanave and Li (2008). The collection includes chapters written by multilingual graduate and former graduate students from diverse English-dominant programs. The contributors share their

experiences and challenges related to their academic literacy practices, navigating those practices from political, social, and cultural perspectives.

Another study that included reflections from graduate students was carried out by Green and Agosti (2011). The study involved a thorough analysis of the extent to which an academic literacies program successfully apprenticed students to academic discourse. The analysis was based on the feedback provided by multilingual international students who participated in the program and the perspectives of the teachers facilitating it. The program aimed to make explicit the academic writing conventions and features such as claiming authority, hedging, and in-text referencing while at the same time it gave the students the opportunity to resort to their L1 discursive practices to negotiate the normative aspects of academic literacy practices in their L2.

Sharma (2018) explored the needs of graduate international students through collecting qualitative data from students and instructors at different US universities. The goal was to provide insights into addressing the challenges those students face during their transition into a new academic culture and recommended pedagogical implications for writing support. Sharma observes that basing writing support on decontextualized language proficiency needs is multidimensional and involves issues such as identity, discourse and disciplinary expectations.

In the same vein, Lea (2004) discusses the integration of the Academic Literacies principles into a graduate program, with an emphasis on acknowledging the students' backgrounds, previous literacy practices, issues of identity, institutional power dynamics and the gap between students' and tutors' expectations of academic written texts. These principles are manifested in the experiences of the participants from US universities in Casanave's (2002) study which views students' disciplinary participation as a diverse, fragmented and conflicted one. For instance, Karine, a master's student in ESL from Russia, aimed to incorporate an authoritative tone in her writing, influenced by faculty feedback focusing on logical arguments. In contrast, Virginia, a sociology doctoral student, withdrew from her studies as she found the language expected in sociological theory to be too distant from everyday communication.

Issues of identity have also been investigated by Erling and Bartlett (2008) and Cozart et al. (2016). Erling and Bartlett (2008) explored how German graduate students

in English studies at a German university negotiated the established academic writing conventions and their abilities of expressing voice in English. The findings show that many students struggled with establishing their authoritative voice and lacked a sense of belonging to the academic community. In other words, the academic community did not provide the students with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge to be members of their community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lack of institutional space has also been found in Cozart et al.'s (2016) study of Danish doctoral students' experiences of writing in English. The institutional discourse did not allow the students to develop their academic identities as writers through the rhetorical and linguistic resources available to them in Danish. The academic discourse, in this sense, did not view multilingual students as having existing membership in other communities of practice (Canagarajah, 2002) which can be considered valuable assets for identity construction in the new academic community.

2.7.2. Emerging Research on Supporting Graduate Student Academic Writing

The topic of academic writing support for graduate students is receiving a growing body of scholarship (e.g. Brooks-Gillies et al., 2020; Lawrence & Zawacki, 2019; Phillips, 2012; Sharma, 2018; Simpson, 2012; Simpson et al. 2016) due to the critical need for graduate students to navigate the complexities of graduate writing. Writing centres that are oriented to undergraduate writers may not address the needs of graduate students doing advanced disciplinary writing and research in which they are expected to have gained the rhetorical moves and practices to claim disciplinary identities (Lawrence & Zawacki, 2019). This means that the demands of undergraduate writing are significantly distinct from those in graduate writing (Henderson & Cook, 2020; Phillips, 2016), which requires more targeted and intentional pedagogical approaches and feedback for graduate students.

Researchers of graduate student writing have engaged in scholarship aimed at suggesting the best pedagogical practices to help students understand the complexities of academic writing and become successful student writers. Lawrence and Zawacki (2019), for example, question the common practice of prioritizing the "higher order concerns" such as argument and thesis over "lower order concerns" such as grammar and sentence-level features. The researchers argue that focusing on surface features is

crucial for graduate students to build their disciplinary identities as these features are intertwined with the rhetorical moves that students can employ to identify themselves as disciplinary members. This is crucial because the way instructors in academic contexts conceptualize a specific disciplinary genre may significantly vary (Currey, 2023).

Similarly, Turner (2019) also criticizes the prevalent practice in graduate writing pedagogy that focuses on macro-level concerns over the micro-level ones and calls for attending to both levels. It should be directive in the sense that instructors should guide graduate multilingual students to notice the disciplinary language features, such as stance-taking features, genre and discourse conventions so that students gain control over their language and build their self-confidence as academic writers (Cox, 2019). In the same vein and due to the increased numbers of multilingual graduate students, Phillips (2017) suggests hiring multilingual writing instructors from diverse backgrounds to provide support in home languages. Moreover, she recommends enhanced learning support focusing on sentence-level features as well as recruiting instructors from different disciplines to develop students' knowledge of disciplinary writing conventions.

A variety of graduate-focused writing programs have been proposed, such as writing centres (e.g. Lawrence & Zawacki, 2019; Lee, 2020; Phillips, 2017; Reardon et al., 2016), writing groups (e.g. Cui et al., 2022; Brooks et al., 2020; Pillips, 2012) and writing retreats (e.g. Murray & Newton, 2009; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021; Vincent et al., 2023). Lawrence and Zawacki (2019) edited a book in which authors contributed their nuanced understandings of the role of writing centers in supporting multilingual graduate students. The authors in this collection provided theoretical and pedagogical implications that may make writing centers an integral part of the graduate student's journey. For example, in his respective chapter, Simpson (2019) argues that writing centers should be positioned as a comprehensive resource for multilingual graduate students, rather than a last-minute resort for editing assignments or dissertations. In other words, they should be considered a space for addressing students' needs that are not met anywhere else on campus. These needs can be identified through surveys to decide on the services that writing centers may provide. Moreover, Simpson suggests moving away from one-on-one consulting to holding group discussions moderated by a writing consultant. These discussion groups can integrate content and language-related concerns and at the same time students can share their advice from their own experience.

Further research by Cui et al. (2022) delves into the effectiveness of writing groups in addressing the needs of graduate students from different disciplines. The study, conducted at a US university with a large multilingual student population, utilized virtual writing group discussions. The participants in the study reported a positive experience across four dimensions of writing support: skill development, time management, draft feedback and emotional support. The researchers conclude that there is no one-fit-for-all writing support program. This means that designing the most beneficial writing support depends on the local needs and challenges of graduate students (Cui et al., 2022; Simpson, 2019).

Improvement in time-management skill was also found in Vincent et al.'s (2023) research on the effectiveness of writing retreats. The researchers found that this form of writing support provided the participants with the opportunity to enhance their self-regulation skills as well as to build their confidence as academic writers. Tremblay-Wragg et al. (2021) also found that structured writing retreats create an environment where participants can share their similar concerns and focus solely on their writing. However, the researchers acknowledge the need for continued support to develop the skills gained during the sessions.

2.7.3. Academic Writing and the Multilingual Graduate Student in the Canadian Context

In the Canadian context, research exploring the construction of international students' academic writing identities has mainly focused on the undergraduate level (e.g. Farzinpur, 2023; Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Kim et al., 2006; Leo, 2012; Li, 2007; Marshall, 2009; Marshall et al., 2012; Séror, 2008; Shi & Beckett, 2002; Zappa, 2007) with few exceptions at graduate level (e.g. Abasi et al., 2006; Zhang, 2011; Qian & Krugly-Smolska, 2008). I will give details of the last group of studies in the following paragraphs.

In her study, Zhang (2011) adopted Lea and Street's (1998) Academic Literacies approach to investigate the perceptions of Chinese international graduate students at a Canadian university. She reported that students expressed concerns about the quality of their surface language due to the deficit perspective and study skills approach that is dominant in the university. Moreover, she found out that epistemological differences

between Chinese and North American cultures created challenges to some students in terms of attribution and critical thinking. Qian and Krugly-Smolska (2008) also examined the challenges and strategies adopted by international Chinese graduate students at a Canadian university. Although the study reveals some valuable insights, it investigates the students' experiences from a cognitive perspective (such as language transfer as an asset in writing) and does not consider writing as a social practice (Ivanič, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Lea, 2004; Lillis, 2014).

Another study that involved multilingual graduate students in Canada was conducted by Abasi et al. (2006). Drawing on Ivanič's (1998) framework of writer identity, the researchers investigated students' awareness of their textual identities and the development of their authorial identities. The researchers found out that students' awareness is based on their level of socialization. In other words, students gradually became aware of the privileged authorial identities available in their academic discourse. This awareness was motivated by pragmatic concerns to identify the academic writing discursive requirements although there was a tendency by some students to contest the academic conventions of their disciplines. For example, one of the participants, Gabrialla, attempted to avoid referencing some terms to create space for her authorial identity in her writing despite her professor's instructions to attribute them. In sum, given the scarcity of research in the Canadian context, I argue that more studies should be carried out to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences, challenges, and perceptions of international multilingual graduate students regarding academic writing.

2.8. Conclusion

In this literature review, I first provided a general analysis of the evolving understanding of identity from an essentialist perspective towards a constructionist one. This understanding views the construct of academic writer identity as fluid and dynamic and discursively negotiated and constructed within specific historical, social and institutional contexts (Hall, 1996; Ivanič, 1998). Then, I explored key theoretical frameworks that help understand this construct. The academic writer identity framework, proposed by Ivanič (1998) and further developed by Burgess and Ivanič (2010), encompasses four aspects of writer identity (the autobiographical, discoursal, authorial, and perceived writer selves) which operate across different timescales. I propose here a

fifth aspect, the future writer self, to add depth to the conceptualization of academic writer identity.

I also examined the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006) as building upon and critiquing skills and socialization models and emphasizing writing as a social practice. It foregrounds the challenges that multilingual students face in navigating writing practices and the "institutional practice of mystery" (Lillis, 2001, p. 14). Its proponents claim that it brings to the front students' identities and encourages critiquing dominant writing practices, as opposed to EAP. However, I highlighted how criticality can be contextually dependent and explained how critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b; Harwood and Hadley, 2004; Pennycook, 1997) may play a reconciliatory role that takes into consideration the contextual factors. Complementing these theoretical frameworks, Hyland's (2005, 2018a) metadiscourse model provides a valuable lens on how academic writers utilize specific linguistic and rhetorical resources to claim authorial voice and enact identity in their written texts.

In Chapter Three, I will analyze the data that the participants shared with me. My analysis will be through the lens of four theoretical frameworks: Academic Literacies (Lillis, 2001; Street & Lea, 1998, 2006), Burgess and Ivanič's (2010) framework of writer identity and my extension of it, Hyland's (2005, 2018a) interactional model of academic writing and critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b; Cherryholmes,1988; Pennycook, 1997).

Chapter 3.

Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline the methodological framework employed in my study to answer the research questions. I will begin by establishing the philosophical foundation guiding my research and articulate the rationale for adopting a qualitative, interpretive approach. Then, I will introduce the participants (both students and instructors) and detail their relevant characteristics. Subsequently, I will describe the data collection methods I used: semi-structured interviews, student written assignments, and instructor assignment rubrics/guidelines. I will illustrate how each method addresses a specific aspect of the inquiry. After that, I will discuss my application of textual analysis to analyze written documents and thematic analysis to analyze the interviews I conducted with the students. Finally, I will address the ethical and validity issues, including an exploration of the researcher's positionality as an insider and an outsider.

3.2. A Qualitative Study

Selecting a research design and choosing methods of data collection and data analysis depend on the researcher's philosophical stance (Burton & Bartlett, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This stance reflects the researcher's worldview, beliefs, values and their understanding of social reality. It includes *ontology*, which refers to our understanding of the nature of reality and *epistemology*, which concerns our approach to how we gain knowledge and how we understand it (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell (2013) states that both imply specific methodological strategies and practices to gain that knowledge. This means that the researcher's philosophical position determines the research approach they employ in their study, be it a qualitative approach, quantitative approach or a mixed-methods approach integrating both approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For instance, a positivist stance might lead to quantitative research where reality is ontologically viewed as single and objective and can be epistemologically understood by applying objective measurements. In contrast, an

interpretivist position ontologically assumes socially constructed realities that can be subjectively understood through qualitative research (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

Unlike quantitative research that tests objective theories through examining the relationship among a set of predetermined variables or discovering certain predicted patterns, qualitative research seeks to operate within the framework of human experiences and the processes through which meaning is derived from those experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2017; Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative research seeks to understand participants' subjective experiences and their understanding of the studied phenomenon "to understand the process by which participants make sense of their own behavior and the rules that govern their actions" (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002, p. 13). Denzin and Lincoln (2017) argue:

> *Qualitative research* is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 71, emphasis in original).

So qualitative research is a situated activity in which researchers study phenomena in their contextual complexity and messiness.

Qualitative inquiry has become a widely accepted approach in fields related to modern applied linguistics as researchers have emphasized the importance of contextual factors in language learning and teaching (Lew et al., 2018), including research on writing. The purpose and practice of writing vary significantly across different contexts, such as education, home, and community, with countless variations in each context (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). This means that as writing is a social practice (Lillis, 2001; Lee & Street, 1998, 2006), writers negotiate their identities to adapt to the requirements of each context. In academic contexts, this process of negotiation is a complex one, with writers attempting to position themselves and at the same time conform to the dominant academic conventions (Hyland, 2012). Writers' past experiences influence their identity negotiation (Ivanič, 1998) and their life stories make

their writing experiences distinct from each other. Therefore, a qualitative approach is suitable for this study to answer the research questions, which require investigating an individual's or group's experience and understanding of a social or human issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In qualitative research, rarely do researchers attempt to generalize their findings to other sites, individuals or contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). As a result, the aim of my study is not to generalize the findings. The values of my research as a qualitative inquiry are "in the particular description and themes developed in the context of a specific site" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 276). This means that my study attempts to provide more insights on the dynamics of the multilingual identity of international graduate students in one specific context with regards to their academic writing and how they discursively perceive and perform these dynamics. Moreover, these insights may inspire pedagogical possibilities for instructors to deal with the challenges that those students face in their academic writing development.

3.3. The Participants

I invited students and instructors, identified by pseudonyms in this study, to participate in my study. As the purpose of the study is to understand the perceptions, strategies and identity construction of international multilingual graduate students with regards to their academic writing in the Canadian context, I invited eight international graduate students who came to Canada to complete their graduate education and who spoke English as their additional language (See Table 2 for student-participants' profiles). They were pursuing their PhD studies in education at WIU. I did not include the data shared by one participant because they provided data that was not directly relevant to the research questions. Moreover, by the time that participant shared their data, I had achieved data saturation where there was no new data and, consequently, no new themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). So, the total number of student participants was seven.

I also invited five instructors from the Faculty of Education at IWU to participate in semi-structured interviews and/or submit assignment rubrics and guidelines of a graduate course they were teaching or had taught (See Table 3 for instructor participants profiles) I did not include the data shared by one instructor participant

because they kept their answers to a minimum and I thought their data did not provide answers to the questions of this particular research. That left me with four instructor

Table 2. ***Student Participants' Profiles***

Name	Gender	Country of origin	Languages spoken	Years in current graduate studies at IWU	Degrees earned
Lisa	Female	Cuba	Spanish, English and French	Two years as a PhD student in the Faculty of Education	BA in English and French Translation (Cuba) and MA in Applied Linguistics (Mexico)
Livia	Female	Kazakhstan	Kazakh, Russian, English, Turkish, French, and German	Five years as a PhD student in the Faculty of Education	BA in Foreign Languages, English and French (Kazakhstan) and MSc.in Educational Leadership (Kazakhstan)
Nadia	Female	Afghanistan	Pashto, Arabic and English	Two years as a PhD student in the Faculty of Education	BA in Psychology (Afghanistan) and MA in Education (Afghanistan)
Sarah	Female	China	Mandarin and English	Two years as a PhD student in the Faculty of Education	BA in English (China) and MA in TESOL (IWU, Canada)
Shirin	Female	Iran	Farsi and English	Two years as a PhD student in the Faculty of Education	BA in English Translation (Iran), MA in Applied Linguistics (Malaysia) and MEd in Teaching Languages in Global Contexts (IWU, Canada)

Stephanie	Female	Mexico	Spanish, English, Italian and French	One year as a PhD student in the Faculty of Education	BA in Foreign Language Teaching (Mexico) and MA in Second Language Acquisition (USA)

participants. The reason for collecting data from instructors was to have a better understanding of the academic context from gatekeepers' perspective on academic writing. This allowed me to deeply examine how students navigate disciplinary writing norms in their immediate context and how they align their rhetorical practices with disciplinary expectations. At the same time, I compared student and non-student participants' perceptions of academic writing and examined to what extent they align with each other.

Table 3. ***Instructor Participants' Profiles***

Name	**Gender**	**Years of experience at IWU**	**Educational background**	**Courses at IWU**
Ashley	Female	Twelve years	PhD in Language and Literacy Education (Canada)	Graduate and undergraduate courses in the Faculty of Education
Jessica	Female	Six years	PhD in Curriculum Theory and Implementation (Canada)	Graduate Courses in the Faculty of Education
Lauren	Female	Twenty years	PhD in Curriculum Theory and Implementation (Canada)	Graduate and undergraduate courses in the Faculty of Education
Megan	Female	Eight years	PhD, Curriculum, Learning and Teaching (Canada)	Graduate and undergraduate courses in the Faculty of Education

The first step to embark on collecting data was to apply for ethics approval. Then, I sent the participants invitation letters through email, explaining the study purpose. After receiving their initial approval, I sent them consent letters to voluntarily participate in the interviews and/or provide written documents. The consent letters explained the procedures and all ethical issues related to conducting the study. All interviews were carried out through zoom, email or in-person. I audio recorded the interviews for transcription while the written documents were converted into Word format for ease of analysis if not originally submitted in that format.

3.4. Research Methods

My methodology was exploratory in nature without prior hypotheses (Croker, 2009). Therefore, I adopted an interpretive methodology which aligns with my positioning as a researcher who views reality as socially constructed and can be investigated through subjective meanings. For this goal, my study involved emergent questions, an employment of different theories, different sources of data, and a deductive and inductive data analysis "building from particulars to general themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 41) to understand the nuanced and context-dependent nature of academic writing. Moreover, I gave my own interpretation to the research findings and situated them in the literature as well as suggested pedagogical implications and future research. To achieve this, I collected data from three sources: written assignments, semi-structured interviews and assignment rubric and guidelines. As opposed to studies based on a single method which are more susceptible to weaknesses, these multiple methods were utilized to deepen my inquiry and enrich the data gathered (Patton, 2015).

3.4.1. Written Assignments

Written assignments have been the main focus of studies that aimed at investigating issues related to identity and student writing practices. Wingate (2012), for example, used students' assignments as one of the data sources to test the effectiveness of three writing initiatives in a UK university. In her seminal book, *Writing and identity: the discoursal construction of identity in academic writing,* Ivanič (1998) used student written assignments to explain her theoretical perspectives on writer identity. She utilizes those assignments to support her argument that writing represents

an act of identity through which writers make discourse choices to demonstrate their alignment with values, beliefs and power dynamics in the academic community. Likewise, Lillis (2001) analyzed extracts from student-writers' texts to understand the meaning-making practices of students and how they made sense of "the institutional practice of mystery." Thus, within the theoretical frameworks that I employed in this study, I used my participants' academic written assignments as artifacts to investigate how they navigated their identities and identify the rhetorical practices they employed to express their voice. I asked the participants to send me one written assignment they had submitted during their graduate studies without specifying its type (See Table 4 for details of the participants' assignments). Six of the seven student participants sent me written assignments.

Table 4. Details of Student Participants' Written Assignments

Name	Type of assignment	Course submitted to	Number of pages	Total word count
Lisa	A reflective journal on her learning in a course	A course in the first year of PhD at IWU	22	6912
Livia	A linguistic landscaping research paper	A course in the first year of PhD at IWU	12	3157
Nadia	An observation fieldnote paper on a school	A course in the first year of PhD at IWU	4	1344
Shirin	Two reading responses to articles	A course in the first year of MEd at IWU	3/5	985/1107
Stephanie	A research paper on language creoles	A course in the last year of MA in a US university	20	4575
Tara	A multimodal analysis research paper	A course in the first year of PhD at IWU	23	6615

3.4.2. Semi Structured Interviews

Interviews as a method are widely used in qualitative research. The purpose of employing this method is to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon through examining the beliefs and experiences of individual participants involved (Gill et al.,

2008). Gill et al (2008) and Brinkmann (2013) categorize qualitative interviews into three types: structured, unstructured and semi-structured. First, structured interviews refer to a list of questions in the form of a quick questionnaire that requires no follow-up questions. They may yield no in-depth findings (Gill et al, 2008). Moreover, Brinkmann (2008) argues that researchers employing this type of interview might leave out data that goes beyond the standardized questions, resulting in missing an opportunity to deeply engage with the interviewee's answers and benefit from "the dialogical potentials for knowledge production inherent in human conversation" (p. 20).

Second, unstructured interviews involve no predetermined questions, or contain at least one prepared open-ended question which may lead to other follow-up questions (Gill et al, 2008; Brinkmann, 2013). Unstructured interviews are "usually very time-consuming (often lasting several hours) and can be difficult to manage, and to participate in, as the lack of predetermined interview questions provides little guidance on what to talk about" (Gill et al., p. 291). In other words, the interviewee can become a passive listener to the participant's whole life story without addressing its specifics and the meanings of certain aspects of life experiences (Brinkmann, 2013).

The third type of interview is semi-structured (Gill et al., 2008; Brinkmann, 2013). Semi-structured interviews provide researchers with the opportunity to deeply explore social and personal issues (Brinkmann, 2013; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Gill et al., 2008). In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews generally involve open-ended questions designed to elicit the perspectives of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gill et al., 2008). They are guided by pre-defined questions coupled with follow-up questions to make use of the potentials in knowledge production in human interaction (Brinkmann, 2013). They also afford flexibility to explore emergent themes that may arise during discussions. This type of interview suited my research as the questions were based on the scholarly work that has been done on academic writing as well as the theoretical frameworks that I employed. This approach to interviewing offered me a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences by initiating meaningful dialogues with the participants. This means that participants' answers also guided the interviews.

To ensure that the interviews were not a one-way process, I encouraged the participants to engage in a dialogue with me to seek clarification on any unclear terms or

concepts and to ask me about my perspectives and beliefs. Being a multilingual student with educational and professional experience outside of and inside Canada, I also shared some of my experiences and values with the participants. The reason for creating dialogic research interviews is because I view them as a social practice that is co-constructed between the researcher and the participant (Talmy, 2011). According to Tamly, viewing interviews as socially co-constructed means that researchers should not seek objective truths in interviews, but rather meaning is collaboratively generated through within the interactional context of interviews.

Creswell (2013) proposes a series of nine steps to conduct purposeful interviews: (1) formulating appropriate research questions that can be answered by the interviewees; (2) employing purposeful sampling of participants who can answer the questions; (3) determining the most suitable interview type (e.g. one-to-one or telephone interviews); (4) implementing effective recording procedures; (5) developing and following interview protocol; (6) piloting the questions and procedures; (7) deciding on the interview location; (8) having interviewees complete a consent form; (9) employing good interview procedures during the process. I followed these steps to ensure that I was conducting effective interviews with the participants.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for the purpose of qualitative analysis. I manually transcribed the interviews and edited the transcriptions to ensure readability and confidentiality. Discourse features, such as hesitations, reformulations and backchannel responses, or any identifying information were deleted. Some words were added by me in square brackets to increase readability. I divided the interview questions into different sets (see Appendices A and B). While the questions formed the basis on which the interviews were carried out, there were emergent questions based on the participants' answers during or after the interviews. In cases where more elaboration on the participants' responses was needed, I contacted the participants for follow-up questions through email.

As for student participant interviews, I also employed what Lillis (2008) termed as a "talk-around-text" method. According to Lillis, this ethnographic method aims to foreground the writer's perspectives to understand written texts. She conceptualizes two different stances that researchers employ when adopting it "as being along a *text-writer* continuum" (*italics in original*, p. 359). The primary focus of the first end is textual

analysis of students' written texts with the talk about these texts providing supplementary data. This can be found, for instance, in EAP textualist research where texts are mainly the subject of inquiry. The other end of the continuum takes into consideration the writer's perspectives and tackles issues that go beyond writing within dominant academic discourses. Research on writer identity is an example.

In my study, I attempted to strike a balance between both ends of the continuum because analyzing written texts using Hyland's (2005) interactional model with supplementary data from the talk-around-texts method provided a deeper understanding of the strategies the participants adopted to produce academic texts. At the same time, foregrounding the participants' emic perspectives through employing Academic Literacies (Street & Lea, 1998, 2006), academic writer identity (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Ivanič, 1998) and critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a; Benesch, 2001b; Harwood and Hadley, 2004; Pennycook, 1997) provided insights into students' perceptions and identity dynamics within the wider academic discourse. To do that, I asked the students to send me their assignments before the interviews so that I was be able to analyze them and prepare questions based on identified textual elements for the talk-around-text phase of the interviews. Through this, I was able to explore how and why students employed certain rhetorical practices and to dig deep into their perspectives on the construction of their academic writer identities.

3.4.3. Assignment Rubrics and Guidelines

The transition to graduate studies requires students to adapt to the conventions of a new academic environment in order gain membership as academic writers in their disciplines. Students are expected to tailor their literacy skills to match the requirements of the immediate academic context and its insiders (Hyland, 2013; Lillis, 2001). Students need to navigate different types of writing as they encounter different demands and guidelines from their instructors and courses (Lea, 2012). These academic demands are usually communicated by instructors through assignment guidelines and rubrics that students are required to follow. This means that assignments are regulated by academic discourse for which disciplinary gatekeepers enforce its conventions of what is acceptable writing (Hyland, 2012).

Assignment rubrics provide students with instructions on how to approach the instructor's demands, the acceptable meaning-making practices and the voice they can project in their immediate context. Therefore, I asked the participant instructors to send me via email an assignment rubric or guidelines they used in a graduate course they had taught or were teaching (See Table 5 for details of assignment guidelines). I analyzed the assignment rubrics to gain insights into the academic context that influences students' writing and understand what impact it has on their identity construction. This analysis shed light on the acceptable rhetorical practices and the available identities that students can take on.

Table 5. Details of Instructor Participants' Assignment Guidelines

Name	Type of document	Number of assignments	Type of assignments	Course
Ashley	Course outline	6	One reading response (5 pages), three reading responses (3 pages each) and final response (6-8 pages) with three-minute in-class overview	MEd course
Jessica	Instructions on mid-term fieldwork reflection paper (part A)	1	Reflective paper (5-7 pages)	MEd course
Lauren	Course outline	6	Three reading responses (1-1.5 page), two facilitations on readings (1 hour long), one presentation of a reading with a one-page summary, and a final paper (12 pages)	MEd course

Megan	Instructions on a final research proposal (part 5)	1	Abstract (250 words), introduction (one page), literature review (8-10 pages), method (2-3 pages), data analysis, and references	PhD course

3.5. Data Collection in Relation to the Research Questions

Data collection followed four stages: a) I collected assignments from student participants; b) I conducted semi-structured interviews that include "talk-around-text" discussions, with student participants; c) I collected assignment rubrics and guidelines from instructors; d) I conducted semi-structured interviews with instructor participants. The reason for choosing this sequence was to allow me to share some of the student participants' perspectives with the instructor participants to gain deeper insights during the interviews. The following table provides an overview of how data collection methods helped address each question:

Table 6. The relationship between Data Methods and Research Questions

Research Questions	Method	Participants
How do international multilingual graduate students negotiate their identities in academic writing?	Semi-structured interviews	Student participants
What strategies do they use to construct their identities as novice researchers within dominant academic discourses?	Semi-structured interviews (including "talk-around-text interviews), written assignments	Student participants
To what extent do their perceptions of academic writing align with the dominant discursive practices?	Semi-structured interviews, written assignments, assignment rubrics/guidelines	Student and instructor participants

To answer the first guiding question (How international multilingual graduate students negotiate their identities in academic writing), I conducted semi-structured

interviews with student participants to explore how they negotiate their academic writer identities in their current program. The questions revolved around their past and current experiences with academic writing to understand how they construct and develop their academic identities within dominant writing practices.

The second question (What strategies they use to construct their identities as novice researchers within dominant academic discourses) was answered through students' written assignments and semi-structured interviews with student participants that involved talk-around-text discussions to identify the linguistic/non-linguistic strategies they employed to project their identities. During talk-around-text discussions, the student participants were given the opportunity to justify their rhetorical choices. This helped me investigate how such choices influence their identity construction. The third question (To what extent their perceptions of academic writing align with the dominant discursive practices) was addressed through semi-structured interviews with student and instructor participants. I also analyzed assignment rubrics and guidelines that were submitted by instructor participants to gain insights into the discursive expectations and examine how they align with students' perceptions of academic writing.

3.6. Data Analysis

Coffey (2014) emphasizes the importance of analyzing documents, be they written or not, because they provide "data or evidence of the ways in which individuals, groups, social settings, institutions and organizations represent and account for themselves (p. 367). Coffey makes a distinction between two types of documents: pre-existing documents in the research setting and those that are made for research purposes. Both types were employed in my study. I collected data from pre-existing written documents, which are mainly students' written assignments and instructors' assignment rubric and guidelines. The reason for choosing this type of documents was to provide rich context and reflect actual practices of the participants regarding academic writing. At the same time, interviews in the form of textual recordings were created for the purpose of my research. They helped me deeply explore the values and experiences of student and instructor participants with regards to academic writing and identity formation.

Analyzing written documents as a method is widely employed in qualitative research (Kuckartz, 2014; Patton, 2015; Schreier, 2012) as they represent different versions of reality (Coffey, 2014). Textual analysis should go beyond the linguistic level to include the discourses on which the writer drew upon when producing those texts (Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough states:

> [Textual analysis approach] focuses on how the 'outside' of a text is brought into the text, as we might put it. This is partly a matter of intertextuality– how texts draw upon, incorporate, recontextualize and dialogue with other texts. It is also partly a matter of the assumptions and presuppositions people make when they speak or write. What is 'said' in a text is always said against the background of what is 'unsaid' – what is made explicit is always grounded in what is left implicit. In a sense, making assumptions is one way of being intertextual – linking this text to an ill-defined penumbra of other texts, what has been said or written or at least thought elsewhere (p.17).

In this sense, when analyzing students' academic writing, researchers should not have an idealized conception of what a text should be, but rather they need to consider students' texts as a valuable subject to understand dominant practices (Lillis, 2001).

I analyzed graduate students' written assignments in light of Hyland's (2005) interactional model (stance and engagement). This helped me identify the rhetorical choices students employ to position themselves in the academic community. I also employed my extension of Burgess and Ivanič's (2010) five aspects of academic writer's identity to investigate how they negotiate their authorial, discoursal, autobiographical, perceived writer and future selves within socially available possibilities of selfhood. These two frameworks were also utilized during the talk-around-text method (Lillis, 2008) to gain deeper understanding of their identity construction and rhetorical moves.

In addition, I analyzed assignment rubrics and guidelines as well as interviews with student and instructor participants. Analyzing assignment rubrics and guidelines helped me understand the dominant expectations and writing practices that international multilingual graduate students need to follow. For this type of document, I drew upon the Academic Literacies approach (Lillis, 2001; Street & Lea, 1998, 2006) to examine how instructors expect their students to project their writer identities in their academic community and whether there is room for deviation from dominant practices. As for the interviews, I used Burgess and Ivanič's (2010) identity framework with my extension of it, the Academic Literacies approach (Lillis, 2001; Street & Lea, 1998, 2006) and critical

pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a; Benesch, 2001b; Harwood and Hadley, 2004; Pennycook, 1997). These frameworks shed light on students' and instructors' perceptions of academic writing and identity construction and whether they align with each other or not.

To analyze student and instructor participants' interviews, I employed thematic analysis, which is a widely used method in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kuckartz, 2014). Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that "thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (p.78). The distinctive feature of thematic analysis is its flexibility with regards to research questions, data collection methods and interpretation of data (Braun & Clarke, 2016). In an attempt to standardize it, Kuckartz (2014) proposes seven phases for conducting thematic analysis, which I followed. The first phase involves careful reading of the texts and highlighting important text passages. The second one is developing main thematic categories which can be derived from the research questions while the third involves initial coding of the written texts using the main categories. The fourth concerns assigning the coded passages to their respective categories and the fifth phase refers to creating subcategories inductively. The sixth phase includes second coding to assign passages to their new corresponding subcategories. The final phase is the presentation of the results. My approach to thematic analysis was not linear, but rather a flexible one, reiteratively revising the steps mentioned above.

Coding research data is at the heart of thematic analysis. Coding, by definition, refers to the practice of identifying patterns, main themes and categories, and ideas in data (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Patton, 2015). Although coding may take different forms, I used three forms explained by Hesse-Biber (2017): descriptive, categorical and analytical coding. While descriptive coding refers to the process of labelling the participants' words and assigning them to topics, categorical coding is where researchers put descriptive codes into general categories. Then, researchers engage in analytical coding to capture meanings and interpretations that go beyond categories and descriptions already created.

Although the analysis was inductive in principle, my approach to data was also deductive, guided by the research questions and the theoretical frameworks (Fereday &

Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Patton, 2015). This is because thematic analysis cannot be conducted in an epistemological or theoretical vacuum (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, there were thematic codes that were generated from the data themselves or codes that were theory driven. In addition, the themes were generated not only based on patterns, but also on their relevance to the research questions because, according to Braun & Clarke (2006), it is difficult to quantify the degree to which patterns determine a theme.

3.7. Validity and Ethical Considerations

The validity of qualitative research has often been questioned by researchers from the positivist camp. Therefore, scholars have emphasized the importance of establishing validity in qualitative inquiry and proposed strategies to assess its trustworthiness (e.g. Creswell 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Maxwell, 2012; Shenton, 2004; Rolfe, 2006). Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers use at least two strategies. Following the suggested strategies of Creswell and Creswell (2018), I implemented the following two validity strategies: *member checking* and *reflexivity*.

3.7.1. Member Checking

First, *member checking* has been central to assess the validity and trustworthiness of findings in qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2013; Morse, 2018, Patton, 2015) though it has been criticized as it does not necessarily enhance research validity (Birt et al., 2016; Motulsky, 202; Thomas, 2017). I believe that this strategy adds to the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings since it involves seeking validation from study participants. It entails presenting data, analysis and interpretations to the participants for their feedback and review in order to avoid misinterpretation of their lived experiences. Thomas (2017) identified two main techniques for member checking that are widely adopted in qualitative research. The first one is sharing interview scripts or case summaries with participants and the second is sending the emerging themes and the researcher's interpretations to the participants. In my research I mainly used the second technique. Although sharing interview transcript gives participants the opportunity to edit their narratives for accuracy, it does not guarantee validation of the researcher's

subsequent analysis (Birt et al., 2016), and it may add burden on the participants when asked to edit dozens of transcript pages (Motulsky, 2021). However, I sent the participants the interview excerpts that I used and the parts of documents I analyzed in order to give them the chance to edit their narratives that are pertinent to my study and to verify my interpretation.

Moreover, while member checking does not seem to be relevant in qualitative studies concerned with theory development, it might be a useful technique in representation studies where the researcher aims to represent and understand the experiences of the participants (Thomas, 2017). Since my research aims to examine and understand the identity dynamics and perceptions of multilingual academic writers, I believe member checking is relevant to it. Member checking also allowed the participants to share their perspectives and provide more insights into the research themes and results and at the same time it allowed me to examine how my biases and beliefs influenced my interpretations.

3.7.2. Reflexivity

The second strategy was *reflexivity*. It refers to the researcher's reflections on their interpretation and how their background (such as ethnic, cultural educational background) may influence their interpretation of the data. The purpose of reflexivity for qualitative researchers is to question the continually evolving relationship between their positionality, the context of their study and the research itself (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). That is, researchers should be reflexive throughout the whole process of their research and question their methodological and analytical decisions.

An example of such reflexivity was when I conducted the first student-researcher interview. During that interview I noticed that the participant had difficulty recalling past events. This observation led me to recognize the potential benefit of sending the interview questions in advance. This would give the participants ample time to organize their responses and remember detailed past events relevant to the study and at the same time it would enrich the data shared by students to deeply understand their experiences. Moreover, requiring the student participant to answer the questions spontaneously would put them at a disadvantage compared to the instructor participants who received the questions earlier. Therefore, I decided to send the questions in

advance, irrespective of whether the interview is conducted in-person, online or by email.

Reflexivity also concerns researcher-participant power dynamics. Lincoln, et al. (2017) contend that reflexivity

> demands that we interrogate each of our selves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives. We must question ourselves, too, regarding how those binaries and paradoxes shape not only the identities called forth in the field and later in the discovery processes of writing, but also our interactions with respondents (p. 247)

This means that researchers should recognize how power dynamics might be at play during the process of research and try to alleviate them. For instance, I realized that sending the interview questions early would alleviate those dynamics since the participants would have a general background on my topic and expect the type of questions that I would ask. However, recognition of those dynamics does not ensure an objective, neutral researcher role (Pillow, 2003), especially as I was an insider and outsider at the same time.

Positionality as an Outsider

I was an outsider as I have my own beliefs, life experiences, worldviews and understandings of the topic that may have influenced my decisions at any stage of the research project. While answering research questions was an attempt to contribute to the literature, those questions were guided by my experience as a multilingual graduate student at a Canadian university. Before coming to Canada, I had finished a master's program in Linguistics in Syria. My study was based on quantitative methods through which I had to analyze data from a positivistic point of view. That is, I had to present my findings and interpretations of quantitative data through an objective language without using, for example, the first-person pronoun "I."

Later, when I joined a Master of Education program in Canada, it was a challenge for me when one of the instructors recommended that we project our own voice explicitly through using the first-person pronoun. As I came to Canada with academic experience in quantitative research during my master's degree in linguistics, I found it difficult at first to challenge other authors or to integrate my own perspective that

might not align with those of the big names in the field of second language learning/teaching. That challenge resonated with some of my classmates' feelings of hesitation to explicitly express their own arguments. To address this issue, I started to read research papers to understand the new rhetorical conventions while paying full attention to how researchers argue with/against other perspectives. I had to learn the rules of the game to acculturate myself into the new academic environment to construct my own writer identity and achieve my academic success.

Mostly, the feedback I received, though positive and constructive, was succinct and did not help to clarify the "institutional practice of mystery" (Lillis, 2001, p. 14). I recall that one of the instructors wrote positive feedback on one of my research papers with one negative comment stating that my paper needed some editing. The instructor did not explain what type of editing was required. I was certain that it was not grammatical because I always worked hard to produce texts that were error-free, and no instructor had commented on the grammaticality of my papers. I thought that the issue was probably pertinent to some academic conventions that I did not follow. I did not seek any clarification because I thought that would add more work to the workload the instructor had been taking. So, I had to work hard to solve this mystery on my own, but I am still uncertain whether I succeeded or not.

Positionality as an Insider

I was also an insider who shared some of the student participants' experiences and was aware of their academic culture. Being a multilingual graduate student, for whom English is not his first language, I shared some similar experiences and struggles with the student participants. An example was the integration of personal voice in scholarly debate. This common ground helped me understand the participants' perceptions of me and my research. It also made student participants feel comfortable sharing their writing experiences. This understanding is helpful to create ethically healthy relationships with the participants (Maxwell, 2013). It also contributed to building a relationship of trust and responsibility that is conducive to open dialogue and comfort with the participants (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

However, Creswell (2013) and Maxwell (2013) urge researchers to reflect on these relationships even if the researchers are familiar with the participants' culture. Therefore, they emphasize the significance of clearly explaining to the participants the

purpose of the study and what the researcher will do with the data collected from them. Before conducting interviews and collecting participants' assignments for analysis, I clarified to the participants the purpose and benefits of my study through the consent forms I sent via email. I also assured them that confidentiality would be secured, that all data would be safely stored, and password protected on my personal laptop. Moreover, I made it clear in the consent forms that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the stages of the study up to the dissemination of the data without giving any reasons and with no effect on their education.

Moreover, I always attempted to do my research *with* the participants, or what Pillow (2003) calls "reflexivity of discomfort." This was another way of reflecting on my awareness of the academic culture. As I mentioned before, the participants engaged in a dialogue with me, raised questions and generated insights that helped me reformulate my research. For example, before conducting my research, I had taken for granted that graduate students did not need writing support courses similar to those designed for undergraduate students. Therefore, my initial plan did not include a theme relevant to that area. However, after doing an interview with a student participant who provided valuable insights on her need for such courses, I decided to cover that area in my research which yielded recommendations for graduate writing support (see Chapter Seven).

3.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I detailed the methodological approach underpinning this study. I justified the rationale for adopting a qualitative, interpretive approach that aligns with the focus of my research on exploring the subjective experiences and identity negotiation of international multilingual graduate students engaging with academic writing. I also explained the recruitment process of both student and instructor participants. The purpose of selecting student participants was to capture their perspectives and strategies in constructing their academic writer identities while the aim for recruiting instructor participants was to understand the contextual expectations set by institutional gatekeepers. I also discussed the data collection methods (semi-structured interviews, student written assignments, and instructor assignment rubrics/guidelines) and described the analysis methods, which included textual analysis of written documents

and thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews. Finally, I explained how I addressed the ethical and validity issues of my study.

In Chapter Four, I will analyze the data that instructor participants shared with me.

Chapter 4.

Instructor Participants: Perceptions and practices

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will thematically analyze the data collected from the interviews with the instructor participants and the documents, such as assignment rubrics and course descriptions, which they shared with me. The data will be analyzed with regards to three main themes: (1) *foregrounding academic voice*, (2) *importance of scaffolded feedback*, and (3) *need for other spaces for academic writing support*. During my analysis, I will shed light on instructors' perceptions of academic writing and their pedagogical practices for the construction of academic writer identity. My analysis will be guided by four theoretical frameworks: the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street 1998, 2006; 2014), academic writer identity (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010) and my expansion of the framework, critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b), and the interactional metadisourse model (Hyland, 2005, 2012).

4.2. Foregrounding Academic Voice

From an Academic Literacies perspective, instructors should go beyond inducting students to the new academic environment; they should view writing from an epistemological and identity-building perspective (Street & Lea, 1998). Since writing is a site of academic identity construction (Ivanič, 1998), pedagogical practices influence how students navigate available identities. These practices are representations of the institutional community where student writers need to adapt their identity building to gain membership. This process can be challenging to multilingual graduate students who have already constructed identities during their previous academic experiences (Ivanič, 1998). This means that they may need to adapt to new rhetorical choices to express their voices (Hyland, 2012, 2018b). Therefore, as gatekeepers of the discursive writing practices in their academic communities, instructors should provide space for those student writers to build their academic writer identities (Street & Lea, 1998).

The first theme that emerged from the data collected from instructor participants concerns foregrounding graduate students' academic voice. According to the participants, this voice is projected through a critical engagement with the scholarship and an explicit presentation of the writer's arguments and beliefs. For example, Ashley encourages her graduate students to voice their perspectives explicitly using the first-person pronoun "I":

> Researcher: You encourage students to have their own voice. What textual features are you encouraging?
>
> Ashley: Yeah, students often go to the third person, but then keep slipping in and out of it. I think that's actually really hard for folks who are used to writing with the English third person pronoun. But I guess often students think it is more scholarly or scientific to write in the third person and I want to challenge that view by encouraging them to write in the 'first person' voice so that they are clear about their relationship to their own inquiry. And that the whole requirement of writing in the passive voice fell off long ago, you know, from what I understand of academic genres. But I always tell students it depends on the context. It depends on the Prof. It depends on the journal. Like you have to learn to write for different audiences, but if you're writing for me, I don't need it to be in the third person and I don't like writing passive texts (personal communication, May 28th, 2024).

Ashley seems to be aware of the challenges that may stem from students' prior academic experiences in projecting their own voices in their new academic environment. She recognizes the epistemological difficulty that graduate students may have when they navigate new rhetorical choices, such as using the first-person pronoun, which she finds more engaging than using the passive voice. However, she acknowledges that academic discourse, represented by factors such as instructor's expectations or the audience, is also significant in determining the appropriate academic literacy practices. This explains the view of Academic Literacies that academic writing is inherently connected to specific ideologies and values (Street & Lea, 2006,1998).

Another reason for the lack of academic voice, according to Ashley, is the employment of AI in academic writing. She expresses her concern that students have started to use AI to generate "hyper accurate" texts that are devoid of their own voices. She is critical of the way digital writing tools are contributing to the loss of students' individual voice and the emergence of a "generic voice":

> I think people are also making wide use of translation and more lately, Grammarly and also ChatGPT and I noticed a change in the writing so that

> it's almost like hyper accurate to the point where it doesn't sound like them anymore. It's a generic voice and this is something that's come up in the last few months (Ashley, personal communication, May 28th, 2024)

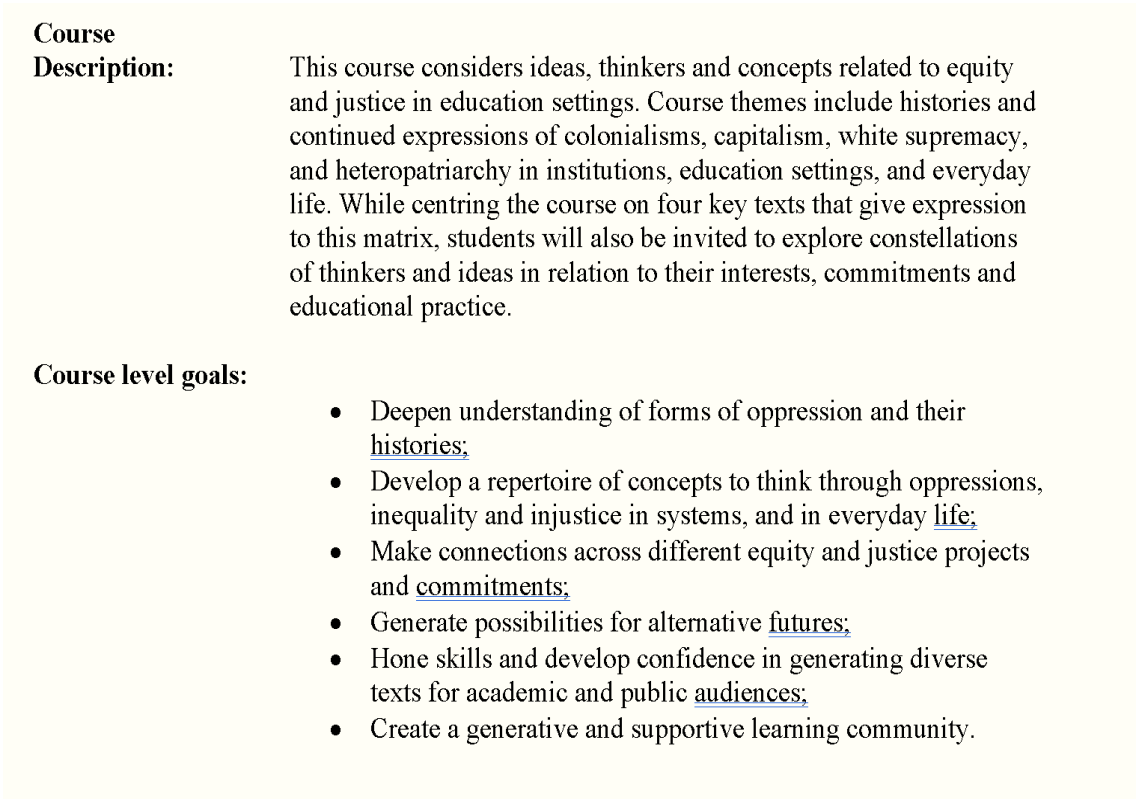
Similarly, Jessica, who states that she lacks enough experience with such tools, expresses the same concern by suggesting that AI may "take away some of students' agency, creativity and voice" and replace students' own voice (personal communication, May 24th, 2024). Meanwhile, Megan, who is also not fully aware of AI use, argues that it can be utilized in a generative way: rather than being employed to replace students' thinking and voice, it can work as a personal editor for students who may not afford hiring human one. Similarly, in line with Ashley's perspective, other instructors expressed their concern over the potential loss of academic voice when using digital writing tools.

To help them project their academic voice, Ashley encourages her multilingual graduate students to project their own perspectives and demonstrate their critical thinking:

> I'm interested in the ideas, but I think that my experience and my wondering is if multilingual students are very sensitive to accuracy and not worried about accuracy more than I am… So, I try to say that I'm more concerned and interested in your problem solving or your analysis and showing that you understand the ideas or that you're making sense of the ideas. And that you're able to, you know, bring them together and apply them to your topic or something. In other words, critical analysis. But I do notice that students get very tied up in language accuracy, and I think that is maybe because the two are connected. it's hard to engage in critical analysis in an additional language when one is also struggling with verb tenses and vocabulary…writing is thinking. So at some point the two are connected. But I think at the stage of graduate studies, most students are really good at thinking and learning to think in a different language… (Ashley, personal communication, May 28th, 2024)

Ashley here values critical thinking over grammatical accuracy though she acknowledges that they might be tied to each other. While she believes that students' concern is achieving legitimacy through language accuracy, she articulates her disciplinary understanding by focusing on higher order thinking. Therefore, Ashley believes that academic voice is perceived through students' ability to conceptualize their own ideas and understandings of the academic topic being studied.

Building students' academic writing voice is evident as a feature of the course outline of a graduate course Ashley has taught. The outline gives detailed information about the course including assignments, course goals, grading, and required and suggested texts (See figure 4).



Course Description:

This course considers ideas, thinkers and concepts related to equity and justice in education settings. Course themes include histories and continued expressions of colonialisms, capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy in institutions, education settings, and everyday life. While centring the course on four key texts that give expression to this matrix, students will also be invited to explore constellations of thinkers and ideas in relation to their interests, commitments and educational practice.

Course level goals:

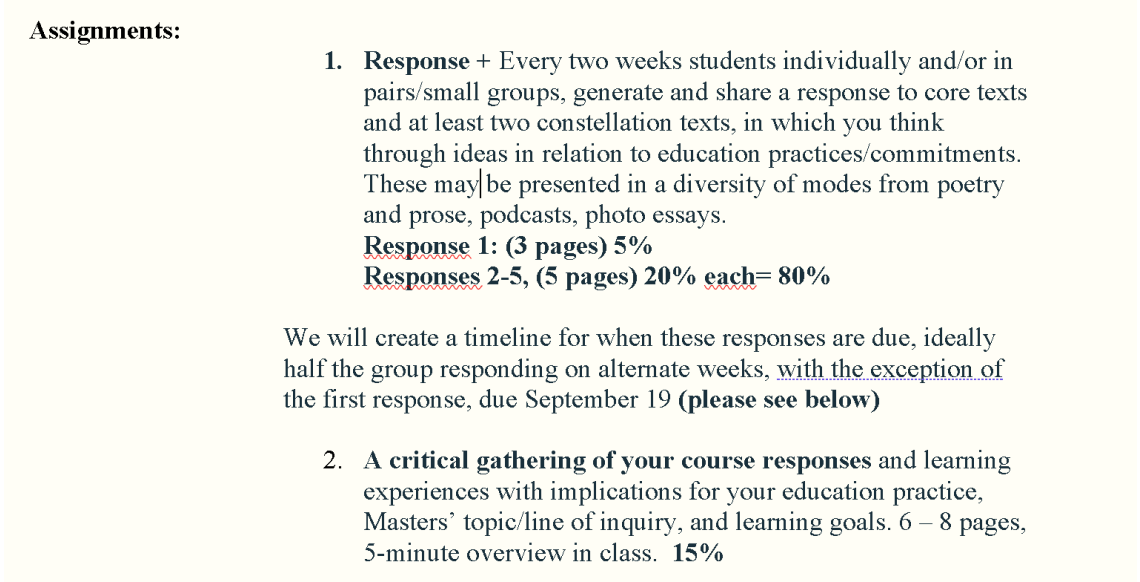
- Deepen understanding of forms of oppression and their histories;
- Develop a repertoire of concepts to think through oppressions, inequality and injustice in systems, and in everyday life;
- Make connections across different equity and justice projects and commitments;
- Generate possibilities for alternative futures;
- Hone skills and develop confidence in generating diverse texts for academic and public audiences;
- Create a generative and supportive learning community.

Figure 4. An Excerpt of Ashley's Course Outline Showing Details of Course Description and Goals

Phrases such as "deepen understanding," "develop a repertoire of concepts to think," "make connections" and "generate possibilities" reflect an emphasis on critical analysis and synthesizing complex ideas. This means that Ashley encourages her students to build their own independent academic voices and form their own informed opinions—discoursal and authorial self (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010). She even asks her students to go beyond critical analysis through encouraging them to "generate possibilities for alternative futures."

An interesting point in the course outline is Ashley's openness to different modes of expression (See Figure 5). The Assignments section shows that students need to submit responses to core and supplementary texts. However, she creates space for her

students to present their responses through a variety of meaning-making practices, such as poetry and podcasts. The flexibility in assignment formats aligns with the Academic Literacies tenets as being embedded in the New Literacies Studies, which values any



Assignments:

1. **Response** + Every two weeks students individually and/or in pairs/small groups, generate and share a response to core texts and at least two constellation texts, in which you think through ideas in relation to education practices/commitments. These may be presented in a diversity of modes from poetry and prose, podcasts, photo essays.
   Response 1: (3 pages) 5%
   Responses 2-5, (5 pages) 20% each= 80%

We will create a timeline for when these responses are due, ideally half the group responding on alternate weeks, with the exception of the first response, due September 19 **(please see below)**

2. **A critical gathering of your course responses** and learning experiences with implications for your education practice, Masters' topic/line of inquiry, and learning goals. 6 – 8 pages, 5-minute overview in class. **15%**

Figure 5. An Excerpt from Ashley's Course Outline Showing Details of the Required Assignments

form of social communication. This allows students to challenge the dominant mode of expression at IWU where academic writing determines students' success. Ashley emphasizes her view by saying, "I think we should be teaching different genres and different modes of meaning making" (personal communication May 28th, 2024), and here she is advocating pedagogical practices that foreground students' preferences in knowledge production. Hence, the development of their academic voice. However, she stresses that the appropriate mode of expression "depends on the goals of the course." In other words, Ashley is aware that students' choices of appropriate literacy practices are based on the particularities of the educational context (Benesch, 2001b).

Moreover, reading responses as course assignments allow Ashley's students to develop their authorial voices and integrate their personal experiences. According to Williams (2019), reflective writing is a type of writing that converges with the principles of Academic Literacies in a way that it relates to students' identities. This was manifested, for example, in Shirin's reading response in which she was able to critically relate her personal and educational experiences as well as cultural background to the theoretical ideas of the article she was responding to. At the same time, in her reading response,

she was able to experiment with a new rhetorical choice (using the first-person pronoun I) to project her authorial and autobiographical self (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010) though she initially found it challenging to adopt this practice. In this sense, reflective writing might be a venue for students to include their voices in a discourse where identity projection is required through the first-person pronoun.

Similar to Ashley, Jessica and Megan stress the importance of integrating academic voice into writing. While it is a significant factor in identity shaping, integrating academic voice can be a challenge for international multilingual graduate students. Jessica, for example, states:

> Many are afraid to tap into creative ideas and lack confidence to include their voice (in other words, they doubt themselves). At the university level, I see a similar lack of confidence to include their own voices in their writing. Students seem to doubt that they have something to say beyond the ideas expressed by other authors and researchers. I feel strongly about bringing one's identity(ies) into writing and so this notion influences my assignments for sure… (Jessica, personal communication, May18th, 2024).

Here, Jessica acknowledges the pervasive pressure for students to conform to objective and impersonal voice in academic writing. She believes that the main challenge for graduate students is "the lack of confidence to include their voices". This view was also iterated by Megan who believes that "confidence to make claims and step away from what other scholars are saying" is the main issue faced by graduate multilingual students (personal communication, May 21st, 2024). Megan even had the same difficulty when she embarked on her academic journey to the extent that she suffered from imposter syndrome, doubting her skills "to make claims and insert [herself] in the scholarship" (personal communication, May 21st, 2024). In this way, both Jessica and Megan are aware that academic writing is not about presenting information, but also about expressing a unique perspective. This aligns with the Academic Literacies' view that writing is a process which involves identity shaping.

To give space for her students to develop their academic writer identities, Jessica asks her students to write reflective papers:

> Many students have not been asked to explore particular formats, styles, or genres. For example, I ask students to write a reflective paper to explore their own biases, beliefs, understandings. Many default to including academic references and using the voices of those authors rather than their

> own voice. I've been told by many of my international students that using their own opinions or voice was strictly forbidden when writing for undergrad courses (these students completed undergrad and graduate degrees for universities in a variety of international settings) (Jessica, personal communication, May18th, 2024).

The perceptions of Jessica's students on academic writing may have been conditioned by different academic norms and linguistic choices. The fact that they were "strictly forbidden" to explicitly integrate their opinions and perspectives may indicate an epistemological gap between their previous institutional discourses and the new one. Jessica attempts to bridge this gap by providing them with the opportunity to "explore particular formats, styles, or genres," such as reflective writing.

She discourages her students from merely "including academic references and using the voices of those authors rather than their own voice." Similar to Ashley, she pushes them toward critical thinking through trying out different genres to have a deeper engagement with the subject matter (English, 2015). This was demonstrated in the guidelines of a Reflective Assignment Jessica sent me (see Figure 6). The assignment mirrors her view by asking students to analyze their personal perspectives as being valuable resources for academic exploration. Moreover, using yellow highlights reiterates the importance of exploring rather than just telling indicates

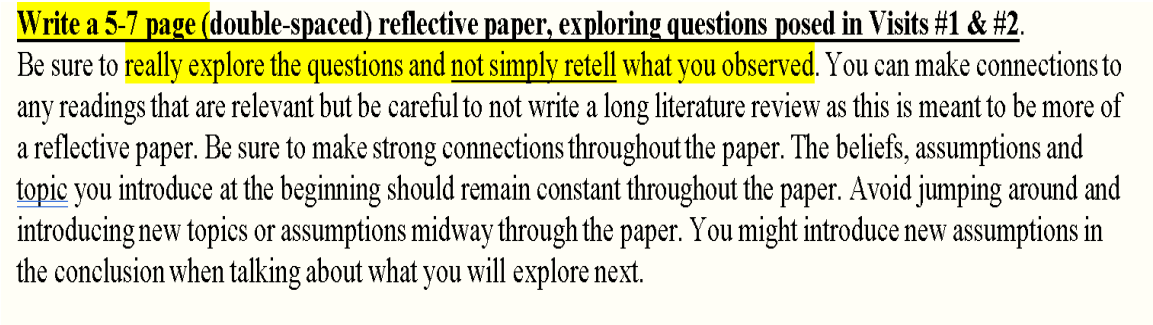
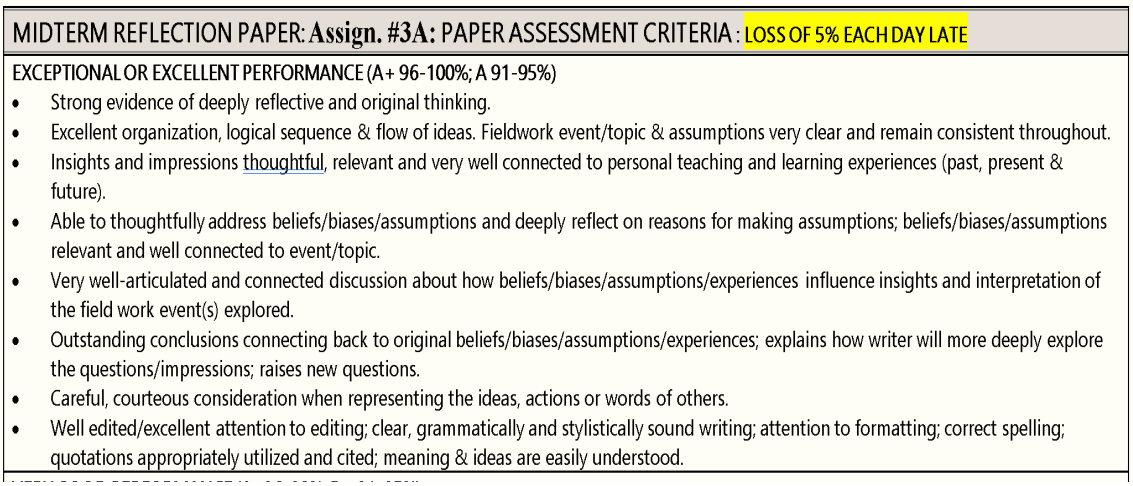

Write a 5-7 page (double-spaced) reflective paper, exploring questions posed in Visits #1 & #2.
Be sure to really explore the questions and not simply retell what you observed. You can make connections to any readings that are relevant but be careful to not write a long literature review as this is meant to be more of a reflective paper. Be sure to make strong connections throughout the paper. The beliefs, assumptions and topic you introduce at the beginning should remain constant throughout the paper. Avoid jumping around and introducing new topics or assumptions midway through the paper. You might introduce new assumptions in the conclusion when talking about what you will explore next.

Figure 6. An excerpt from Jessica's Reflective Assignment for a graduate course (highlights in original)

Jessica attempts to allow her students to build their discoursal and authorial selves (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010), which are reflective, critical and self-aware. By asking her students to "really explore the questions" rather than simply narrating events, she is inviting her students to create a paper that is more than a description. This creates space for the autobiographical self to be incorporated in the paper and the authorial voice to be shaped. Furthermore, the sentence "You can make connections to any

readings that are relevant but be careful not to make a long literature review" indicates that citing established scholarly work is optional as the assignment is "meant to be a reflective paper." This is demonstrated in the assignment's Assessment Criteria section that does not require citing other scholarly work (see figure 7). Here, students' experiences and reflections, which are considered valid sources for knowledge production, are given priority as articulated in phrases such as "Strong evidence of deeply reflective and original thinking," "Able to thoughtfully address



MIDTERM REFLECTION PAPER: **Assign. #3A:** PAPER ASSESSMENT CRITERIA : LOSS OF 5% EACH DAY LATE

EXCEPTIONAL OR EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE (A+ 96-100%; A 91-95%)

- Strong evidence of deeply reflective and original thinking.
- Excellent organization, logical sequence & flow of ideas. Fieldwork event/topic & assumptions very clear and remain consistent throughout.
- Insights and impressions thoughtful, relevant and very well connected to personal teaching and learning experiences (past, present & future).
- Able to thoughtfully address beliefs/biases/assumptions and deeply reflect on reasons for making assumptions; beliefs/biases/assumptions relevant and well connected to event/topic.
- Very well-articulated and connected discussion about how beliefs/biases/assumptions/experiences influence insights and interpretation of the field work event(s) explored.
- Outstanding conclusions connecting back to original beliefs/biases/assumptions/experiences; explains how writer will more deeply explore the questions/impressions; raises new questions.
- Careful, courteous consideration when representing the ideas, actions or words of others.
- Well edited/excellent attention to editing; clear, grammatically and stylistically sound writing; attention to formatting; correct spelling; quotations appropriately utilized and cited; meaning & ideas are easily understood.

beliefs/biases/assumptions," and "Outstanding conclusions connecting back to original beliefs/biases assumptions/experiences."

Figure 7. An Excerpt From Jessica's Assessment Criteria for the Reflective Assignment

In the same vein, my interview with Lauren reveals a strong focus on the concept of students' voice as a significant component in their academic writing. As shown in the following interview excerpts, she repeatedly stresses the importance of students developing their own voice in academia:

> …If you ask me what I expect, I think the important thing is that I see people developing the academic voice so that they are much more clear about what they want to say from their perspective, but at the same time be very much involved in the literature…So you have to really share your own perspective, but it has to be an informed perspective so it's a lot about negotiating…But at the graduate level, really the focus is on developing an academic voice and how are you going to develop it…. (Lauren, personal communication, June 25th, 2024)

Lauren here expects her students to explicitly integrate their authorial voice in their writing. However, this voice has to be "informed" and grounded in a solid understanding

of the relevant literature. This means that for her students to build their academic writer identities, they should negotiate their positions and perspectives within a network of existing scholarly debates. For Lauren, striking a balance between presenting their own voice and positioning it in the literature is one of the main challenges for graduate multilingual students:

> …For me the issue is sometimes you have people really focus too much on "This person said this and this and this and this" and you don't hear their voice and if you go to the other extreme. where people are very much trying to share their own personal, you know, experiences around teaching or learning a language, but there isn't enough connection to the literature, so the key for me is whether somebody has been able to make this connection to really show a balance of whatever the literature says and whatever they are able to express… (Lauren, personal communication, June 25th, 2024)

Asking her students to situate themselves in the literature, Lauren tries to give room for her students to build their discoursal self as well as authorial self. This resonates with Megan's emphasis on the importance of how student writers should be able to "insert themselves into the scholarship…agree, disagree, illuminate, or question something" (personal communication, May 21st, 2024).

In line with other instructors, Lauren states that the main reason for multilingual graduate students' difficulty in building an authorial voice is the epistemological differences between students' prior experiences in academic writing and the new discursive academic expectations:

> One of the commonalities, especially for international students, is, I guess, they come from parts of the world, like where I was, where there isn't much of an expectation of bringing your own voice. It's more about developing the confidence to do that …It takes time. It takes effort. It's very much a process of identity negotiation too, like because you develop a new identity in writing. (Lauren, personal communication, June 25th, 2024)

Here, Lauren acknowledges that academic writing is a site of identity negotiation and shaping (Ivanič, 1998; Lea, 1998, 2004; Lea & Street 1998; Lea & Street, 2014; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Turner, 1999) where students need to appropriate their understanding of writing in accordance with the dominant academic conventions. Stating that building an authorial voice is "more about building confidence" challenges a deficit model of academic writing. It suggests that the perceived lack of voice is a result of different cultural norms and academic expectations.

Moreover, Lauren insists that her students should learn certain rhetorical moves to explicitly project their own voices:

> But at the graduate level, really the focus is on developing an academic voice and how you are going to develop it. Certainly, education within our faculty it is very important and encouraged to use "I" like "I believe that" or "I view." So, it is a much more of a kind of firm position that you share than if you try to just talk about "Well, one could think oh blah blah blah"… So I do expect to to see "I" in the writing…. (Lauren, personal communication, June 25th, 2024).

Lauren expects her students to use phrases such as "I believe" and "I view" to position themselves in the academic community. She believes that it is possible for undergraduate students not to use "I," but for graduate students it is one of her expectations as self-mentioning is highly recommended and encouraged to understand their perspectives.

Therefore, Lauren usually asks her graduate students to write more than one reading response to give them space to explicitly express their voices. This was manifested in a course outline of a graduate program she has taught (see Figure 8). The outline shows that students need to submit three reading responses as one of the

- **Responses to readings** (15%)

Purpose:
To provide an opportunity for active reflection on some of the readings
Content:
Choose one of the **required** readings (**other than chapters in Burns and Richards (2012) or other facilitations readings**) in week 1-4, week 5-8, week 9-12, and provide a 1-1.5 page long (typed double space, 12 font) written response which addresses the following:

- What do you see as the main points in this reading? (summary)
- Do you agree or disagree with the author? How do you respond to this reading? How does it tie in with your experiences, beliefs, other readings, expectations? (critical analysis)
- What questions does the reading raise in you? (directions for future investigation of the topic of the reading)

Evaluation: You will be submitting 3 responses to readings (due in **week 4**, **week 8,** and **week 12**) and each of these responses will represent 5% of your final grade for the course.

Figure 8. An Excerpt from Lauren's Graduate Course Outline

course assignments. The three papers give students the opportunity to position themselves within a specific academic discourse community. Requiring responses to assigned readings encourages students to adopt the conventions of academic

engagement and scholarly conversation, such as summarizing, analyzing and questioning. The expectation to tie the responses to "students' experiences, beliefs, other readings, expectations" points to building students' discoursal self. Moreover, encouraging students to explicitly show their agreement/disagreement with the author of the required reading relates to developing students' authorial voice while asking them to suggest "future investigation of the topic of the readings" points to giving a space for agency and confidence that, according to Lauren, multilingual international graduate students may lack.

However, similar to Ashley, Lauren shows flexibility in accepting other meaning-making practices to allow more creative expression that is conducive to identity building. When I asked her if she allows her students to deviate from her expectation of academic writing, she gives an example of a portfolio assignment she asked her graduate students to submit. In that assignment, she gave her students room for any literacy practice of their choice to present their learning:

> Just kind of the way I go about it is, I mean, if this is not going to be a graded assignment, then I'm not going to expect necessarily that it's in academic English. If it is something that you account for the grade for this course, that kind of I have to submit the final grade for to the institution, then I will expect that they meet these expectations, but within the process, as I say, I'm very excited to give students opportunity to bring some other stuff. I mean … if you think about the portfolios that [they] do for [their] comps in the program. I am very open to a lot of kind of different ways to do that. Somebody could bring a poem. Somebody last time it was a very kind of humorous way of writing about all this instructor was this and this instructor was this. And I was fine with that because it was a portfolio. It was not an academic paper. Then I accept that as a really good way to present your learning, which is part of the final grade. But if it's the only grade, I don't know whether I'll feel comfortable saying "yes, you have met the academic requirements of institution" (Lauren, personal communication, June 25th, 2024)

Lauren's openness to "other stuff" like poetry challenges the standardized way knowledge is produced in academia. Giving students the opportunity to employ their unique ways of engaging with the material values their individual voices and ways of knowing. This aligns with the Academic Literacies, which calls for challenging academic conventions that limit students' agency. However, Lauren shows what I may call *cautious flexibility.* It is true that she encourages different rhetorical and expressive styles, but she takes a critical pragmatic stance in the sense that deviation from

dominant literacy practices is defined by context (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b). Similar to Ashley, Lauren acknowledges the existing power dynamics in academic institutions where assessment plays a role in maintaining them (Lea, 2004) and by which students need to abide. Her view falls in accordance with Hyland's (2018a) in the sense that higher education students need to learn the appropriate disciplinary literacy practices to secure success.

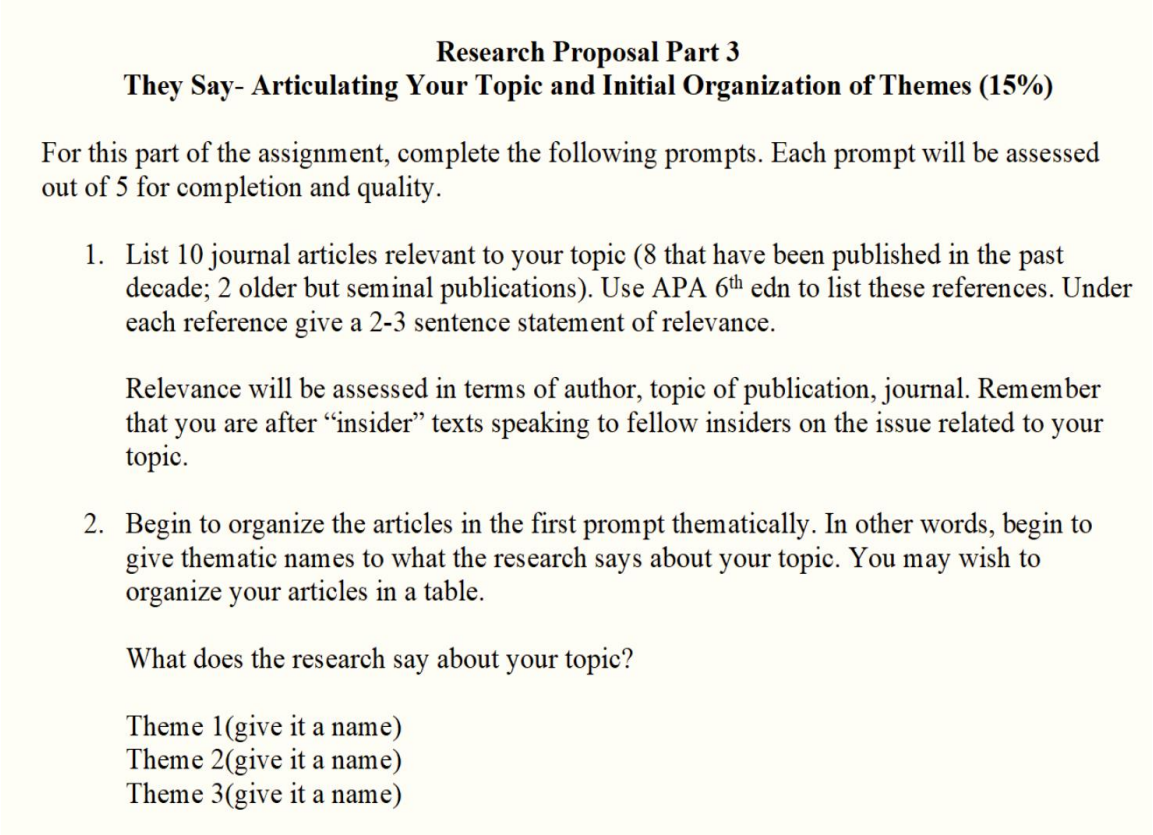
4.3. Importance of Scaffolded Feedback

The second theme that emerged from the data collected from instructor participants is related to scaffolded learning of academic writing conventions and making "the institutional practice of mystery" (Lillis, 2001, p. 14) explicit. According to Hyland (2012), the mastery of academic writing norms enables students to participate in new academic discourse communities and shapes their ways of understanding the world. For multilingual graduate students, this mastery is a significant factor in their academic success as they need to act as insiders who can understand and produce new knowledge in their new communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Jacobs, 2005; Tardy, 2005; Wenger, 1999).

However, the process of mastering academic writing is a daunting task which needs tremendous effort to accomplish. Megan believes that the act of writing is personal and at the same time scary because writers put their claims and arguments under scrutiny. Therefore, she seeks to cultivate confidence in her students through scaffolding her assignments and providing constructive iterative feedback. She gives an example of a course on research methodology she is teaching to explain how the process of scaffolding takes place:

> I had multiple assignments. One of which was the lit review … I realized what they really needed a lot of support with was feedback on their writing. So, I really broke down my assignments, and I've scaffolded the written assignment so the lit review assignment. I've made it into 5 mini assignments that we they make up along the way. So in each one I'm looking for different things. So, for example in the beginning I'm not really assessing … stylistically how they're writing. I'm looking for "Are they able to identify themes in the? How are they able to identify appropriate literature and then are they able to pull across themes? What are people saying in this field?… then the next part that I assess for is what they're able to say. How were they able to insert themselves into the scholarship (Megan, (personal communication, May 21st, 2024).

Instead of expecting students to tackle the entire literature review at once (see Figure 9), Megan breaks it down into a series of manageable mini-assignments to allow them to understand the unfamiliar conventions of academic writing. She realizes the overwhelming nature of her assignment and shows flexibility in adapting the course requirements to meet those needs.



Research Proposal Part 3
They Say- Articulating Your Topic and Initial Organization of Themes (15%)

For this part of the assignment, complete the following prompts. Each prompt will be assessed out of 5 for completion and quality.

1. List 10 journal articles relevant to your topic (8 that have been published in the past decade; 2 older but seminal publications). Use APA 6th edn to list these references. Under each reference give a 2-3 sentence statement of relevance.

   Relevance will be assessed in terms of author, topic of publication, journal. Remember that you are after "insider" texts speaking to fellow insiders on the issue related to your topic.

2. Begin to organize the articles in the first prompt thematically. In other words, begin to give thematic names to what the research says about your topic. You may wish to organize your articles in a table.

   What does the research say about your topic?

   Theme 1(give it a name)
   Theme 2(give it a name)
   Theme 3(give it a name)

Figure 9. An excerpt of Megan's Literature Review Assignment Instructions

As can be seen, Megan recognizes that students need clear instruction on what is valued and expected in the particular academic writing context. Moreover, not focusing on "stylistically how they are writing" at this stage indicates that her feedback prioritizes "high-order concerns" (Lawrence & Zawacki, 2019), such as summarizing, identifying scholarly debates and arguing. Megan justifies her view by stating that she does not want to overload her students with feedback:

> I try not to overwhelm people with too much feedback…so I'm pretty careful to pick one thing, maybe two things …If it's happening over and over again, for example, I try to really focus on that, I try to focus on like one thing and I do things that are bit harder first, like the more surface-level, things like copyediting or punctuation. I will say it, but I won't make a whole thing about

> it. Like I'll say, “come see me about it”. That's why I also like to do the scaffolding, iterative thing because I can catch If they're making grammar mistakes and punctuation mistakes on the first one, they're also going to be making it on the third version, so I get worried about that in number 3. I don't want to say these are all the things you're doing wrong. I want to say let's focus on these couple things like “How do we really integrate other people's voices into the writing”… (Megan, personal communication, May 21st, 2024).

Megan’s approach to feedback is selective and iterative. It is a method to pinpoint areas of improvement in high-order skills while issues in surface features, such as copyediting, are dealt with if they are repeated. This indicates minimized surface-level feedback and suggests a shift towards more conceptual issues such as “integrat[ing] other people’s voices into the writing.” This approach is also adopted by Ashley who does not necessarily assess language accuracy at first, but rather she looks for “inventive or new ideas, even if they don't always workout” (personal communication, May 28th, 2024).

Lauren is also in favour of scaffolded learning and feedback to make academic conventions clear to multilingual international graduate students. When I asked about her pedagogical practice in case a student submits an assignment that deviates from the expected academic writing norms, she replies:

> I will simply talk to a student. I'll certainly get down and try to explain why something that the way they've written is unacceptable…then I'll give them a chance to redo it...I don't want to fail people. I want people to be successful…And that's where I think it's the prep, the scaffolding that needs to happen for this not to occur…Hopefully next time they'll do a better job. I mean I don't want to penalize students If I haven't done the job of preparing them (personal communication, June 25th, 2024)

Here Lauren recognizes that feedback is a social practice (Nicol, 2014; Price et al., 2011; Tuck, 2012; Winstone & Careless, 2019). By “simply talk[ing] to a student,” Lauren applies feedback as a negotiation process that demystifies her expectations. Moreover, giving her students “a chance to redo [the assignment]” indicates her awareness of the complexities of academic writing in which failing is a necessary part of learning (French, 2018). This was demonstrated in the course outline she provided (see Figure 5 above) in which she asks her students to submit three reading responses:

> Maybe if I've pointed to a student that these are things that I'm expecting in a couple of writings of theirs and then at the end they continue on, then I might be more like harsher in the way I grade, but certainly at the beginning I'm not at all…I usually ask people to write these short

> responses. I think three throughout the semester…Maybe the first response is not very kind of …It's not very well developed in terms of what I thought they'll bring, but by the second time there is certainly improvement and usually at the third time they're doing it absolutely right. And for me like this response is a minor paper in a way…(personal communication, June 25th, 2024)

Being lenient at the beginning in terms of grading and not expecting well-developed initial assignments may reflect Lauren's deliberate attempt to create a low-stakes environment with incremented feedback. According to her, this will help her students acquire "their own writing style within again North American academia" (personal communication, June 25th, 2024).

Lauren's approach to feedback goes, to a great extent, in line with those of the other instructor participants. For example, Jessica is interested in supporting her students through scaffolded feedback. She provides feedback on an ungraded assignment which can benefit them in their graded assignment :

> I am very interested in supporting students to reach their full potential. Fortunately, I have one ungraded course where students can receive feedback that can be applied to their writing in the second course (which is graded). I know students are often overwhelmed by the amount of feedback given by me and often take this personally (eg. They interpret the feedback as a reflection on who they are as individuals). For this reason, I need to always clarify that the feedback is intended to help them further develop their writing (or presenting) skills and is no way a reflection on them as persons (personal communication, May18th, 2024).

Jessica seizes the opportunity that one of her courses is not graded to provide her students with explicit feedback to ensure improvement. Here, she recognizes the importance of removing the barriers of evaluative pressure to create a space for *safe failure* where students, who might be overly concerned by evaluation, can take risks. However, she acknowledges that the amount of feedback she provides might be overwhelming, but she mitigates this pressure by clarifying the goal of her feedback as not judgmental but supportive. Accordingly, communicating the goal of feedback with her students may demonstrate her attempt to remove the power dynamics that it may create (Baker, 2017).

In the same vein, Ashley argues that building a solid relationship with students "allows for [feedback] to be productive and not seen as humiliating" (personal communication, May 28th, 2024). She believes that it is the responsibility of the instructor

to give feedback on students' writing which should be viewed as an object of inquiry. One way to do that is breaking down assignments into connected sections:

> Increasingly, I began breaking down assignments into sections, and then each of those sections is an assignment and one flows into the other, and … I give feedback on each of those sections rather than giving feedback and grading an assignment that I see for the first time at the end of the course when it's really too late for any changes or any growth or development (personal communication, May 28th, 2024).

Ashley's approach seems to be prioritizing the *process* of learning over *product* itself. This move- away from the sole product-based approach gives room for "growth" and "development" and aligns with main principle of the Academic Literacies emphasizing the importance of guided engagement with disciplinary knowledge and practices. Throughout this process, Ashley gives explicit feedback which students are expected to respond to in the next assignment.

4.4. Need for Other Spaces for Academic Writing Support

The third theme that emerged from data collected from instructor participants is their emphasis on the importance of providing other opportunities for graduate writing support. From a social practice point of view on writing (Street & Lea, 2006, 2009), the requirements of "good" academic writing change as students change space. Therefore, they need to learn the dominant writing conventions of their new academic community. One opportunity that was suggested is creating writing communities. For example, Megan believes that there is a false dominant assumption that graduate writers are good writers. Therefore, based on her own PhD journey and her belief that writing is an isolating act, she emphasizes the importance of creating writing groups in which students give and receive feedback to improve their own writing as well as others':

> The other thing that really helped me as a writer, which was incredibly helpful, which, I think, we could help facilitate those grad programs is a writing group, small writing groups of three or four. with you, with your own peers help so much with accountability, consistency, being able to get feedback, getting used to be able to get, give feedback and get feedback. Because often when we give feedback, we can see the lack of coherence or the loose structure or the gaps in other people's writing. But then we can't see them in ours, right? (personal communication, May 21st, 2024).

Megan states that she creates such groups with her PhD students and shares with them her own previous writing challenges. Similarly, Ashley contends that writing support is "a legitimate activity" that should be supported by "creating community and push[ing] along research and ideas…through reading and writing with … students all the time (personal communication, May 28th, 2024).

Another opportunity is designing writing courses dedicated to graduate students only. Ashley argues that a contributing factor for the lack of graduate academic writing is the absence of such courses, especially "lots of profs, not necessarily in education but lots of profs say 'It's not my job to teach writing'" (personal communication, May 28th, 2024). Similarly, Lauren recommends an optional writing course for graduate students who are unsure of what the academic writing expectations are. Moreover, Megan believes that graduate students need more explicit instruction:

> I think that we need more targeted, explicit support in writing. I think that a lot of people assume that, you know, if you're at the graduate level, whether you're doing your doctorate or your masters, you're already a good writer when we know that's not true when we know that the writing expectations are so different than it is for undergraduate students. (Megan, personal communication, May 21st, 2024).

Megan's view aligns with Henderson & Cook's (2020) and Phillips' (2016) perspectives that graduate writing is significantly different from what is required in undergraduate studies, due to its complexities and demands. Therefore, beyond a general writing course, she argues that there is a need for other parallel writing courses, especially for PhD students, to minimize attrition rates. These courses should be tailored to the different PhD stages as some students "might be in their research proposal stage, sometimes they might be doing data analysis and sometimes they might be disseminating and writing articles or, you know, conference proposals or whatever" (Megan, personal communication, May 21st, 2024).

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed data collected from instructor participants. The findings from the instructor participants showed that the instructors recognized the challenges that international multilingual graduate students face when engaging in academic writing and, in response, those instructors attempted to provide sources to overcome them.

They also revealed that instructors employed pedagogical practices, such as scaffolded feedback and encouraging reflective writing, to help multilingual graduate students build their writer identities. Moreover, the instructors acknowledged the need for more writing support for graduate students. This support could be in the form of writing courses or creating writing communities.

In the following two chapters, I will analyze data shared by student participants. In the first one (Chapter Five), I will analyze the data under one overarching theme: the weight of academic writing conventions.

Chapter 5.

Student Participants: The Weight of Academic Writing Conventions

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will thematically analyze the first set of the data collected from the interviews that I conducted with the student participants. This analysis will be supported by thematic analysis of written assignments the students shared with me. I have divided the analysis in this chapter into two main sections: (1) *transition to graduate studies and identity projection* and (2) *the burden of being a novice researcher*. My analysis will be guided by four main theoretical frameworks: the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street 1998, 2006; 2014), academic writer identity (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010) and my expansion of the framework, critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b), and the interactional metadiscourse model (Hyland, 2005, 2012).

5.2. Transition to Graduate Studies and Identity Projection

The graduate level poses a great challenge to students as this level requires deep knowledge and broader understanding of theoretical concepts. One of the aims of my interviews was to understand how the student participants navigate academic writing conventions and to what extent they feel the weight of the discursive writing practices in their institution.

Lisa, a PhD student participant in the Faculty of Education, states in the interview that she believes that writing in English has become easier for her now. This is because she gained experience in academic writing during her studies in Mexico, where she took an EAP course during her undergraduate studies and one on research methodology in her master's program. However, she admits that she still faces some challenges with academic writing with regards to phrasing her ideas and beliefs in a way that they might not be misunderstood by the reader. In this sense, she seems to be concerned about her perceived writer identity and discoursal self to ensure that readers acknowledge her

membership in the academic community. Although Lisa feels comfortable with her academic writing abilities, she describes being unsure whether writing will ever be easy:

> And it's … definitely a lot easier. It's still not easy. I don't know if it if it'll ever be easy per se, but it's definitely easier than when I started at the beginning. The more that I've written academically, the easier it's become. Not saying that it's easy because you know it's never really easy, but it's definitely a lot easier than at the beginning when I started writing academically. I would struggle a lot and then, you know, like I would, for example, when I started writing my thesis, like in Mexico …… Now in the PhD, I think that I have reached a point where I feel pretty comfortable writing academically. Of course, it's never perfect, so I still get like, …..from like my classmates, from the professors and all that. (Lisa, personal communication, May 12th 2024)

This explains that Lisa is aware that learning academic writing is an ongoing process and contingent on continuous practice though it may never reach perfection. This is evident in her reflective journal as a written assignment for one of her PhD courses. In her journal, Lisa writes:

> The course instructor explained that we should [write a research journal] to support our understanding of reflexivity's role while conducting qualitative inquiry …I had never kept a research journal either, so I was unsure how to develop one, which made me feel somewhat stressed, as I was still figuring out several aspects of the PhD program, the university and life in a new country. However, little did I know how enjoyable I would find this task to be… Therefore, after taking this course and keeping this journal, I have come a long way from the knowledge I had about research at the beginning of the term. From not knowing what the onto-epistemological stance or research paradigms were in the first week of class, I have realized that I mostly lean towards the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm of qualitative inquiry because of how I see the world and how I would like to gain knowledge about it.

In the journal, Lisa reflects on her progress as a novice researcher and on the onto-epistemological perspectives that she had not been aware of. She demonstrates her growth from initial uncertainty to a more informed understanding of qualitative research paradigms. She also reflects on the new writing genres that she tried during the course, such as writing a research journal and fieldnotes.

Being encouraged to try a new writing genre afforded Lisa the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter and build a critical and authorial stance. This stance is clearly manifested, for example, when she reflects in her assignment on

an observation activity she had conducted for the first time in the class and the field notes she had taken during that activity. Lisa writes in her journal:

> Reading these words make me realize that I could conduct oral history because this is the method you should use if "You value people's experiences about historical moments in the past and are concerned that certain kinds of experiences, if not documented, will not provide the knowledge that is currently missing in our social documentary." I could maybe use this method combined with nexus analysis.

The extract above gives a clear example of Lisa's authorial voice when she engages critically with two research methods (oral history and nexus analysis) stating that incorporating them might yield fruitful data. So, trying new genres seems to have shaped her thinking and knowledge production (English, 2015) and she seems to construct her academic identity through building on her past academic experience in her Master's (autobiographical self) and learning new concepts to adopt new values and beliefs (discoursal self). Moreover, throughout her paper, she projects her authorial voice by using the first-person pronoun "I" (Hyland, 2005).

In the same vein, Livia, who holds a Master of Science in Educational Leadership from Kazakhstan, argues that her experience in academic writing and the knowledge she gained during her past educational journey (autobiographical self) have positively contributed to a smooth transition to her current graduate studies at IWU. She states: "The background that I had actually was very, very helpful in my PhD studies, like the knowledge that I came with, the experience that I came with was very useful" (Livia, personal communication, May 10th, 2024). That background made it easy for her to understand how the dominant meaning-making practices work in her program. She states that she abides by them in order to be successful and receive high grades although it might be at the expense of expressing her true identity:

> Well, the thing with writing the research paper or just papers in general, you do not always write them the way you want to write them…You usually write it for others. And I think there is a degree to which you can really show your identity unless there are no limitations. Sometimes you sort of suppress the identity because if I really say what I want to say…I guess they will misunderstand me ….And then it can have negative repercussions. (Livia, personal communication, May 10th 2024)

Livia holds a pragmatic position to meet the reader's expectations. Her adaptation seems to be achieved through constructing a perceived writer self that is informed by her

autobiographical self. However, her discoursal self might be constructed contrary to what she would like it to be. This is because of the potential suppression of her own values and beliefs. Similar to Lisa, Livia seeks to position herself as an academic writer through drawing on and building different selves.

In her assignment, which is a linguistic landscaping study, Livia clearly attempts to follow academic writing norms. She divides her assignment into sections and engages critically with the linguistic landscaping literature through citing different sources. She positions herself through employing different stance and engagement features (Hyland, 2005a). The following are extracts from Livia's (2019) assignment:

> …**we can become aware** of the linguistic diversity of the area, as well as see the hidden agenda under the usage of the particular languages on the signs.
>
> The most heated debate **could probably** be seen around the distinction between plurilingualism and multilingualism…
>
> However, **it also should be noted** that bottom-up signs, the same as top-down ones, are almost never monolingual in the language other than English. it also should be noted that bottom-up signs, the same as top-down ones, are almost never monolingual in the language other than English. **Not surprisingly**, languages such as Mandarin, Cantonese or Italian are almost entirely dependent on private initiative for inclusion in the linguistic landscape…
>
> the speakers have to be able to produce expressions which are **highly** valued on these 'markets.'…
>
> Therefore, **I strongly** recommend to accompany the study of linguistic landscape with additional qualitative tools…(Livia, 2020, personal communication, March 16th, 2024, my emphasis)

Livia uses attitude markers (e.g., surprisingly, it should be noted), boosters (e.g. strongly, highly and hedges (e.g. could probably) to support her arguments. Interestingly, she uses the first-person plural pronoun "we" throughout her assignment more than the first-person singular pronoun "I". When I asked her why she utilized the first-person plural pronoun, she replied that she wanted to involve the readers in her research. Here, Livia seems to construct her perceived writer self. Her phrase "we can become aware of" in the second extract above indicates that she assumes the audience share with her the same values and beliefs. Moreover, she attributes the use of hedges to the fact that as a researcher she cannot be certain of her findings. This means that she appears to build

her discoursal self through positioning herself as a qualitative researcher who holds a paradigmatic stance and beliefs that give her access to the academic community.

Although Livia's transition seems to be relatively smooth, she acknowledges that in her program there are students whose transition to graduate studies has not been as smooth as hers. She shares with me a story of a student in her program who is struggling with academic writing, and she wonders how students manage to get admitted without having the appropriate level of academic writing proficiency. Her view is interesting because it might reflect the dominant premise that graduate students in academia can unproblematically be acculturated in their disciplinary writing cultures (Lillis, 2003). This view was also shared by some other participants. For example, Lisa thinks that as a PhD student it is expected of her to show a high level of academic writing, which she thinks her current program has not helped her to improve. Similarly, Sarah believes that in her program it is assumed that all students have had certain training in academic English that qualified them to be admitted.

Some insights into the struggle of some graduate students that Livia mentioned can be gained through looking at Nadia's experience in her PhD program. English was not the medium of instruction during Nadia's master's degree in her home country, Afghanistan. Her transition does not seem to be as soft as that of the other student participants. She views herself as lacking the appropriate resources to write academically and as not being able to use complex ideas and low-frequency words. She underestimates her writing as being simple compared to the writings of native speakers. The assignment she submitted to me was observation fieldnotes which she had submitted to a course at an early stage in her program. In that assignment, she narrates her observation of a classroom in Canada and provides rich and dynamic details in simple, easy-to-follow language:

> The elementary school and kindergarten are located side by side. **I** chose this school as my observation site to answer the question: **what behaviors and emotions do boys and girls show?** I went to the school on a beautiful sunny day on 23rd June…
>
> … They looked very happy and were showing their emotions by smiling, laughing, running, and jumping. Some of the kindergarten kids were carrying their dolls and toys. Most of the kids were running toward the playground near the school to play…

> …**I** learned how the world of kids is different and how their emotions are rapid, and feelings are temporary, no matter what culture or country the child grows up in.

According to Nadia, her ability to provide vivid and detailed description of the setting is attributed to her previous experience in using observation as a research method in her home country. Her autobiographical self comes into play to establish herself as a well-qualified researcher in the academic community. Her authorial voice is clearly presented in the use of the first-person pronoun "I" throughout her paper and it is clearly shown in the argument she presents in the conclusion as shown in the last sentence of the above extract. Another interesting point is that she starts her assignment with a question, which is employed as an engagement feature to involve the reader, according to Hyland (2005a). However, she said that she used it as a prompt for her to conduct her research.

I asked Nadia if she considers her assignment as academic; she said that because she uses simple language, she does not view it as academic enough. If she had to do it again, she would write longer stretches of sentences and employ more academic vocabulary:

> The way that I wrote it, it was good because I put attention to every details, even some of the details that the instructor asked me was missing. But most of the details, even the way the color of the clothes the children were wearing or the toys that they were playing with, or the environment that was so. These are the things that I already know from my previous work and how to do an observation as part of the research data collection. So from that point I think it's a good but from point of the English writing it's not. (Nadia, personal communication, May 12th 2024)

Her satisfaction with the value of her assignment can be understood as twofold. First, it was successful because she paid attention to details in her observation as a researcher. She learned this skill during her earlier research in Afghanistan. Here, her autobiographical self helps her build her authorial and discoursal selves as a researcher. Her perceived writer self can perhaps be understood through conveying an impression to the reader that she is well versed in this research method. Second, she felt that her assignment was not up to the standards of English academic writing because it does not include longer stretches of sentences or more academic words and that might hinder her belonging to the community of academic writers.

Nadia described using her multilingual resources to navigate writing norms and conventions. In co-authoring articles back home, she would write all the stages of the research in academic Pashto, her mother-tongue, first and then translate them into academic English. She still uses this technique to improve her academic English writing. Moreover, she employs more multilingual resources as she sometimes resorts to Arabic and Farsi when writing in English to make rhetorical contrasts between the languages. She admits that this strategy has given her more confidence as a legitimate writer when she compares herself with those who can speak only one or two languages. In other words, her sense of being an academic writer is supported by her multilingual identity unlike Lisa and Livia who state that they lack the proper knowledge of academic writing in their first languages, Spanish and Kazakh respectively. So, Nadia's academic writing journey shows a conscious effort to negotiate her identity as an academic writer and constant endeavours to belong to the academic community.

Stephanie, on the other hand, believes that writing academically in her first language, Spanish, is generally easier than writing in English. She feels more comfortable presenting her ideas, beliefs and values in her first language. She states, "Spanish would definitely be easier because like …, my vision of life is in Spanish, so my opinions, my values, my morals, everything kind of like in Spanish" (personal communication, May 10th, 2024). She has a long experience in writing in Spanish in high school and during her undergraduate studies. She wrote papers in different subjects, such as ethics and philosophy, in Spanish. Nonetheless, she recognizes the potential easiness of writing about topics related to language education in English. This is because she has studied those topics in English-medium educational contexts.

Despite her confidence in writing about language education topics in English, Stephanie still faces challenges in academic writing. She believes that the English language is "cold" and "structural" because it is straightforward while Spanish is "warm" and "welcoming" as she can express her ideas and values in more details:

> Stephanie: I would describe English academic writing as a little bit cold. I think it depends on the type of and the style and the person the colour, but in general it's like very structural…
>
> Researcher: That's an interesting term. What do you mean by cold?

> Stephanie: … maybe it's because Spanish is my first language. In Spanish since we use a lot of words to get to the core of what we are saying, maybe it feels a little bit more inviting, or warm or welcoming. And I don't feel like that in English… It's just very straightforward…I'm not saying it's bad, but that's how I kind of like perceive it (personal communication, May 10th, 2024).

Stephanie received comments from her instructors during her master's that her argumentation needs to be more direct and without excessive details. She received similar comments when she first started her PhD at IWU.

The "coldness" of English that Stephanie feels can be understood in her opinion about the assignment she sent me: "read my paper like read my data… that's I think that's what I mean by cold. It's just very straightforward" (personal communication, May 10th, 2024). Her assignment was the first academic paper she had written. It was a research paper submitted to one of the courses in her master's program in the US. It is a study on the development of one of the Spanish creoles in the Philippines. Throughout her study, she attempted to use an objective "straightforward" language through distancing herself. She uses the first-person pronoun "I" only three times when she explains the objectives of the paper and the analysis method she used:

> Therefore, in this paper, **I** intend to explore three linguistic systems for each language: morphology, syntax, and lexis. **I** will use a descriptive method using a qualitative approach to collect data from previous researchers. **I** intend to use works on language contact and creole development; sociocultural connections between Mexico and the Philippines during the Spanish conquest

She attributes the use of neutral language to the expectations of her instructor who insisted on not using first person pronouns. As she claims, that did not allow her to express her beliefs freely. So, the available possibilities of self, here, disrupted the construction of her discoursal as well as her authorial self. However, she says that if she had to submit the same assignment in her current PhD program, she would clearly refer to herself because the instructors encourage students to present their own perspectives through a subjective language. Despite that, she still feels that academic expectations still limit her from using a "warm" language that is rich in details and emotions.

To present her findings and arguments in her paper, Stephanie used hedging devices, such as *perhaps, could, suggest:*

> …This analysis **suggests** that there are specific areas that could be more intelligible than others…
>
> … sharing this linguistic feature **could** be a middle ground or bridge between the greatly different grammar…
>
> … it **seems** that Mexican and Philippino cultures share a lot of ideologies at least regarding formal register and what this implies in their language and society…
>
> … **Perhaps** elderly zamboangueños **would** be able to understand Spanish as they are more familiar with its syntax and morphology…(my emphasis)

Through these hedging devices, Stephanie attempted to position herself as a researcher who produces knowledge that is open to debate and who overtly avoids making strong and definitive claims. Interestingly, when I asked her about the use of those devices, she said:

> It mostly because like what I was saying earlier like mostly that I was not sure If it mattered what I said and also, I didn't want my professor to tell me "How can you be sure of this? ... So probably I didn't think I was confident enough. And also my, like, environment was not welcoming (personal communication, May 7th, 2024).

So, using hedging devices for Stephanie was to avoid receiving negative comments from her instructor and to cover her lack of self-confidence. When she submitted the assignment, she was not sure that her opinion mattered, and she did not want her instructor to question her findings. But rather, she wanted to present arguments in cold objective language. Consequently, hedging for Stephanie functioned as a technique to meet certain discursive expectations as well as to feel secure from criticism in an unwelcoming environment.

Stephanie attributes the discrepancy between her knowledge of presenting her opinions and the dominant practices of argumentation to her prior experience in academic writing: she had never taken an academic writing course either in her undergraduate studies nor in her master's. Moreover, her master's program did not include submitting a dissertation. Her autobiographical self was, therefore, not considered to be a resource enough for her. She even started to question her past education in Mexico. To fill that gap, she expressed the wish that there was an academic writing course designed for graduate students to learn the dominant academic writing

practices in her current PhD program because she still faces difficulty formulating her ideas and writing coherently.

Stephanie's difficulty in expressing her own values and beliefs (discoursal self) may resonate with Sarah's struggle to reconcile between her own perspectives and the disciplinary conventions. Sarah is a Chinese student who is pursuing her PhD in International Languages and Curriculum at IWU. Her experience of learning academic writing can be understood in terms of three phases. The first one was when she did her bachelor's degree in China. She did not learn a lot of academic writing and she did not enjoy it because she was discouraged from projecting her voice. Rather, she was encouraged to detach herself from her writings through using what she calls "neutral language." The second phase was when she started her master's degree at IWU. Now, she felt the gap between the academic writing experience that she had already possessed (autobiographical self) and the one required in her new institution. She admits that she improved her academic writing during that phase.

However, Sarah explained that at IWU she had the same experience of restricting her agency. In her master's program, she was also encouraged to distance herself from her research through using a third person singular tone:

> Researcher: How different is academic writing from your academic writing right now like in, in your current program from the one where you did your master?
>
> Sarah: Oh, sure. Well, I did my masters in a very different major as you may know. So, the aim was different. And I got a different kind of a little bit different kind of training. So usually we used third person tone instead of, you know, first person while I was doing my masters, so usually we would for example we would say that this research is going to talk about such and such…
>
> Researcher: So how has your past writing experience, whether in your masters or during your bachelors, influenced your writing for your program now? Did it have any negative influence or positive influence?
>
> Sarah: OK, let me think. I remember that when I did my bachelors, I didn't really enjoy academic writing, but because the rules were very rigid and we [didn't] have our voice in the academic writings of course so yeah, we were writing like, there's an aim already set. There is a purpose for this, for this kind of writing. So, writing to get to that goal and to achieve that kind of purpose instead of an open-ended kind of writing. And I got a similar kind of experience in my academic writing in master's as well (personal communication, March 21th, 2024).

Here, it seems that Sarah experienced an onto-epistemological transition when she started her third phase of learning academic writing in her current PhD program. During her master's program at IWU, it appears that the dominant practice was based on a deductive positivist position to carrying out research. She would start research by setting a hypothesis and work towards proving it. This position required different meaning-making practices from her current PhD program where she is encouraged, as she reports, to use the first-person singular and to experience different approaches, such as autoethnography and hermeneutics.

The different institutional writing practices that Sarah experienced during her undergraduate and graduate studies can also be traced in Shirin's perceptions of the development of her academic writing. Shirin stated that her actual learning of academic writing conventions commenced when she began her second master's degree at IWU. She graduated in Iran with a bachelor's degree in translation and studied MA in TESOL in Malaysia. According to her, the institutional writing demands were not strict in both programs and she did not receive constructive feedback on her writing. Although she took two EAP courses during her bachelor studies and submitted assignments and research papers during her first masters, she had no knowledge of the surface features of writing essays, such as writing a thesis statement or what to include in the body paragraphs. Moreover, similar to Sarah and Stephanie, she was discouraged from including her personal perspective in her writings (discoursal self), which created a challenge for her when she began her second master's at IWU. In that program, it was her first time to submit different writing genres, such as reflective papers and reading responses, where she had to use strategies such as self-mention to position herself:

> Researcher: So, but how different is academic English writing that is required in your program from the writing you were familiar with?
>
> Shirin: Well, the one that I was familiar with as I told you, there was no inclusion of my voice in academic writing. But as I told you in in the assignments, especially reading responses and reflective, and it was very hard for me, Mohammad, at the beginning to like accept it and believe it that it's fine. It's OK if I include my voice ... If I talk about my experience, I remember that each time I used to like add something that was, for example, my perspective or the way I look at things, I felt guilty at the beginning of all the time I was like, no, no, no, no. I have to, like, write it in passive voice. I have to, like exclude using "I" or in my opinion, or I think, well, I remember it was even to the end of the program I used to struggle (personal communication, May 21th 2024).

The emotional burden of feeling guilty when using the first pronoun “I” can be understood as a difficulty for Shirin to position herself in a new epistemological context where she had to, as she states, “wash away everything and start afresh.” Here, her autobiographical self was not resourceful enough to help her build her writing identity. Moreover, she states that in her first language, Persian, it is not common to use subjective language in academic writing and to sound academic she needs to use complex vocabulary and structure.

Shirin’s initial struggle to incorporate her personal voice during her second master’s at IWU can be understood in the two assignments she sent me. They are reading responses to articles of a course in her master’s program at IWU. Throughout her assignments, she adopts a reflective stance and draws upon her personal experiences to support her arguments. She utilizes the first-person singular “I” to project her authorial voice. Coming from an educational background where she had not been allowed to refer to herself, she initially found it difficult to include her own perspectives and personal experiences in those assignments. However, she reported that with time she gained agency when she submitted other reading responses since she felt empowered to include personal anecdotes to support her reflections and felt that including past experiences made it easy for her to project her voice:

> Shirin: I remember in the assignments that I sent you when for example we could talk about like our ideas and also I could talk about my background, my identity, my culture…the people in my country, the language, the languages that are spoken in my country. So whenever I had the chance, I included them in the right thing, but I think it is mostly depending on what the question is.
>
> Researcher: So that was the reading response. What about other assignments? How do you project your writing identity?
>
> Shirin: There was another reflective analysis also that I added my experience as a teacher. I defend my arguments by using articles from the people who are from my own country, publishing their work most of the time they're publishing in Persian. There was another assignment. It was auto-ethnography, I remember. And I actually added my memories of my childhood as well. I didn't include any evidence or any reference. I was just freely talking about my own experience. (personal communication, March 28th, 2024)

The above excerpt from the interview shows that drawing on her autobiographical self, Shirin was able to employ her cultural and linguistic background as well as life

experiences to position herself as a writer who could reflectively and critically respond to articles. Moreover, she described being able to navigate different types of assignments in which she could include personal experiences or bring in scholarly references from the literature.

The following excerpts from Shirin's assignments show how her autobiographical repertoire functioned as an asset in constructing her identity in the new academic community

> Assignment 1
>
> In Iran, Persian is culturally, politically, and economically dominant. The indigenous languages are losing their own characteristics, and among many members of the young generation, language shift occurs. As Gholami (2020) confirms, "In many areas of Iran, political, religious, and social tensions are creating situations in which speakers abandon their languages and traditional ways of life. These speakers generally turn to the primary use of Persian, which is the country's dominant language and associated with social and economic power." In one of the schools **I** used to work for as an English teacher, many students could speak one of these languages as a mother tongue. (my emphasis)
>
> Assignment 2
>
> As an international student in Canada whose mother tongue is not English, **I** have experienced this pattern while observing conversations between native speakers and immigrants as they try to grade their language based on the perceived proficiency level of the listener…
>
> …Mackey et al. (2013), argue that while comprehensible input is necessary for L2 acquisition to occur, it is not sufficient. In the case of my niece, she was exposed to English as she watched English cartoons only. Although she had enough exposure to that language she did not have the chance to interact with an English language speaker and her parents used Persian to communicate with her…
>
> Moreover, Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) is explained in this article as the fact that second language learners must be pushed to produce the output. **I** agree that language learners must be forced through either motivation or the need to speak the language they are trying to learn because generally learners are accustomed to listening more than speaking because of the affective filters …(my emphasis)

Here, Shirin incorporated references from her cultural background and included anecdotes from her own personal and professional experience in her assignment to support her arguments. When I asked her how she felt when she used the first-person

singular “I,” she said that it enabled her to explain her perspective clearly (discoursal self) without hiding behind others’ words. However, she admitted that the inclusion of “I” was also to meet her instructor’s expectations. Here, it seems that self-mentioning functioned as a strategy to build her perceived writer identity.

Similar to Shirin and the other participants, Tara, the final student participant, was encouraged to use the passive voice and avoid using the first- person pronoun “I” in her written texts during her previous education. She admits that during her master’s degree in Armenia, she could not voice herself or present her beliefs. However, she started to build her own discoursal self through her own publications where she projected her own voice and beliefs. Her first PhD even consolidated her identity as an academic writer and that paved the way for her to adapt to her current academic context. As a result, she seems to have experienced the smoothest transition to her PhD program as compared to the other participants.

Tara did not seem to face major challenges in academic writing when she started her current PhD, stating that she thought that the academic writing conventions at IWU are not different from those that she was already familiar with:

> Tara: There is no difference between what I was doing in UAE or in Armenia or in Oman as compared to what I am doing here [at IWU]. It's the same academic writing. I did a similar type of work when I completed my first PhD and I wrote for different courses …I don't see any difference. It's the same academic writing
>
> Researcher: How have your past writing experiences influenced your writing for your program as a PhD student at [IWU]?
>
> Tara: Because I have published a lot of papers and I've been in several research projects, grant projects throughout my life, I don't think that there has been a big shift, immediate shift from one stage to the other that I can now share with you. However, it came gradually. It came gradually after I finished my university. Of course I was struggling with academic writing styles language, putting together my ideas into a paragraph. How could I start? How could I finish and how could I use references? All of those were still in question forms in my head, but gradually when I started getting into practice into writing circles into research groups, into ground projects, into revisions, then I became an editor and step by step that I developed my academic writing skills and so it just came by time.
>
> Researcher: And so your past experiences had a positive influence on your academic writing in your program now?

Tara: Of course, yes, yes (personal communication, March 29th, 2024)

Tara employs her established membership in the academic community to provide her with resources to position herself in the new academic environment. This means that she resorts to her autobiographical self that she has been establishing throughout her academic and professional journey to position herself as a legitimate academic writer. However, Tara admits that she faces some challenges, which seem different from those faced by other participants.

Tara employs her autobiographical self strategically in different contexts to build her fluid discoursal self, which is informed by her perceived writer self. She projects her Armenian voice if she is engaged in research related to her Armenian background whereas her "neutral" researcher identity is presented when researching topic irrelevant to it:

> Researcher: And how do you see your voice and identity in your academic writing now?
>
> Tara: It depends on what I'm writing and it depends on the topic, the style, the organization I am writing for…For example, I'm working in my own country in the English Language Association Group and we are constantly [doing] comparative studies that we run where the Armenian factor is involved and the English factor is involved and the third language factor as a Russian speaker is involved. There … I can feel my identity as an Armenian because I identify myself as Armenian and my voice and my identity is clearly seen through my academic writing because there I write as an Armenian scholar... So my identity there as a researcher to explain my point and consult to a literature and mainly Armenian literature … and keep my identity and my voice as an Armenian because my point is to write from that perspective and for the Armenian audience and readers….But when I am writing something else, for example, now I am researching the difference between digital and the traditional ethnography, so my Armenian voice is not there because it has nothing to do with my country. So, I am now very neutral as a researcher…It is just a researcher (personal communication, March 29th, 2024).

Tara's perspective shows that different academic spaces require showcasing different voices based on the audience. Tara employs her autobiographical self strategically in different contexts to build her fluid discoursal self that is informed by her perceived writer. For example, she utilizes the Armenian literature and her Armenian cultural background and experiences to negotiate her Armenian voice and convey her beliefs

and values to the reader. However, that Armenian voice is obscured if she is researching a topic irrelevant to it; she adopts a neutral voice.

In her assignment, which she submitted during her first PhD term, Tara projects her "neutral" researcher identity without using any self-mentioning strategies. She analyzes a multimodal online application through a semiotic analysis framework and divides her paper into different main sections: abstract, literature review, theoretical framework, analysis, discussion and conclusion, and limitations. She employs academic language throughout her paper and integrates scholarly references. The following are excerpts from her assignment:

> …Electronic texts can be **highly** interactive…
>
> … To be able to move from the abstract concept of 'interactivity' to its effects, design and operations, **we** need to first understand two deferent phenomena it equally refers to…
>
> … So, if the language and communication between humans is an *interactive process and action*, then **what is communication between humans and computers?** …
>
> … this study will consider for the theoretical framework…
>
> … The explanatory text above the bars in Figure 2 **makes it clear** for the user that the page is for operational use…
>
> …**We** have learned over practice that…
>
> …The student is dressed in national Emirati clothes, which **suggests** that producers wanted to add gender and national meaning to it not included in the text…(my emphasis)

Tara uses different linguistic features to build her discoursal and perceived writer self, such as boosters (e.g. *highly*, *makes it clear*) hedges (e.g. *which suggests*) and engagement markers (e.g. *we, what is communication between humans and computers?*). When I asked her why she used rhetorical questions in her paper, she replied that she frequently used this technique to engage the reader and invoke their curiosity about her topic. Similarly, when I asked her why she used *highly* as a booster, she replied that she intended to invite the reader to start thinking about her topic and read her paper.

To understand the reason for the absence of the first-person pronoun “I,” I asked Tara where she could see her authorial voice in the following paragraph from her assignment:

> According to Halliday’s Functional Grammar, language is a human communication system and medium for people in modelling and representing their world of experience that is manifested by the element of 'process' in a clause. Kress (2010) also gave a similar interpretation of human communication and explained, “Communication is focused on social (inter-)action in a social relation of me with others, as my action with or for someone else in a specific social environment, with specific relations of power” (p. 49). So, if the language and communication between humans is an *interactive process and action*, then what is communication between humans and computers?

She replied that showcasing her authorial voice was not necessarily accomplished through the use of the first-person pronoun “I,” but rather through the use of other techniques such as consulting other scholarly work. She stated that her authorial voice is evident when she writes a statement with no in-text citation. She argues that the use of the first-person pronoun “I” is contextual and depends on the purpose of the text. If she had used this pronoun, she believes that her paper would be an essay rather than a research paper.

5.3. The Burden of Being a Novice Researcher

According to the proponents of Academic Literacies (Lea 2004; Lea & Street 1998, 2006; Lillis, 2011; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Lillis & Tuck, 2016), students should be encouraged to contest the academic writing conventions in order to alleviate their discursive weight and create space for students’ voices to be projected. Lillis and Tuck (2016) acknowledge the difficulty of applying this principle at the undergraduate level because students are still in the process of gaining mastery of writing. The researchers recommend that criticality would be more easily applied at the graduate level. One of the aims of my research is to understand whether graduate students are unproblematically willing to challenge those discursive writing norms. To investigate the student participants’ perspectives on adopting that stance within the dominant writing practices in their institution, I asked them how they adhere to those practices and whether they are willing to engage in challenging them.

Graduate students navigate academic writing conventions through their literacy practices in their programs and may have different perspectives on those conventions. For example, within the socially available possibilities of selfhood (Burgess & Ivanić, 2010; Ivanić, 1998), Stephanie believes that learning those conventions and the "rules" of writing is a priority for her before challenging them. She understands that she is not in a position that allows her to deviate from the dominant practices which, according to her, are already challenged by some famous scholars, such as the feminist Sara Hamid. Stephanie believes that, in her case, were she not to follow those norms, she would be able to express herself more freely, describing a situation that is supervised by what she calls "a little boy" who ensures that her writing strictly adheres to the rules of the game:

> Researcher: Do you think that it would be easier if you didn't follow the academic writing norms and conventions?
>
> Stephanie: Yes, 100% because I have written things by myself before. I love writing and I think that was a very, very shocking because I love writing. But like all these dimensions they don't let you write freely because you need to you have, like uh, in in the back of your mind, you have like a little boy saying "ohh this is good, but you need to reference." (Stephanie, personal communication, May 10th 2024)

Personifying the academic norms as a person may demonstrate Stephanie's awareness of the power dynamics that those conventions create and the need to work within them. To challenge that "little boy" and construct her writer identity, she prioritizes understanding how the academic community norms work and where they come from. So, for Stephanie, understanding those norms will enable her to build her future writer self which will be capable of contesting them.

The "little boy" seems to be present when she wrote the assignment she shared with me. She attempted to follow the dominant academic conventions in her master's program through, for example, citing other scholars, dividing her paper into sections similar to the ones found in academic research papers, and using objective language. When I asked her whether she would write it differently if she had the chance in her current program, she replied that she would express herself clearly and avoid using objective language. This is because, according to her, she feels that her own perspectives are valued by her current instructors. Nonetheless, she still feels that she needs to familiarize herself with the disciplinary writing practices to validate her arguments.

Stephanie's pragmatism resonates with Livia's stance on contesting the writing norms. Livia takes into consideration her personal goals when writing. She states that her ultimate goal is to succeed in her program and receive good grades; therefore, she is meticulously careful in her writing to follow the institutional meaning-making practices:

> I wouldn't be able to change right now. And I guess I might want to change it later, but when I am in the position we are doing that won't risk my position that much because first of all I need to, yeah, think about myself honestly. I'm really hopeful about it. I really admire people who try to do something already, but I just I do not know many people like these personally, but it does seem to me that they do probably also have to compromise in certain things (Livia, personal communication, May 10th 2024).

Livia thinks that changing the rules of the game may yield unwanted consequences, which may risk her future ambitions. This means that she wants to work as an insider in the community and build her writer identity through accommodating her writing practices to the standards of the academic discourse. At the same time, she acknowledges that breaking the rules and using other meaning-making practices, such as visual presentations, would make academia more interesting and enriching. Therefore, adhering to the rules, she constructs her future writer self as an approved academic writer who may accept some compromise and challenge those rules.

The burden of being a novice academic writer was also shared by Shirin, Lisa and Nadia. They believe that they are still too new to academia to take the initiative and confront writing conventions. Interestingly, Lisa calls it a "career suicide":

> Ohh challenge?! I think that I'm like a very novice researcher and I don't think that I have the expertise to challenge anything like that. Maybe like I know in 10 years I would. But like right now I'm in no position to do that. I'm just trying to learn from everybody and from all of the things you know like all the people around me, so I think that, you know, I'm way too young when it comes to, you know, writing academically…I probably wouldn't. I wouldn't think that that is smart a smart thing to do. As I was saying, I'm like very new to this field so I don't think that I would want to like I would think like, you know, sometimes like people talk about like career suicidal or some like that, you know, like, because people who have done these things before, like just being bold, their ideas have been like canceled, you know, from the field (Lisa, personal communication, May 12th 2024).

Here Lisa's future writer self is dependent on mastering the norms and being able to navigate them. She is aware of the discursive power relations and the weight of

academic writing conventions on novice researchers. Learning those conventions will help her establish herself as an academic writer who through experience may gain a position where she can contest and challenge those academic norms. Her pragmatic perspective is also manifested in her belief that learning “the rules of the game” will help her succeed in academia otherwise that would be a “career suicide.”

However, to some extent, the style of Lisa’s assignment seems to have deviated from that of the common academic written assignments. Although she wrote her assignment in academic language and consulted references, she added an artistic touch through applying a colourful background, artistic shapes and fonts (see figure 10). I asked her why she chose to write her assignment differently, she replied she wanted to impress the reader as the assignment is mainly a reflection on her learning experience. She could express herself freely in a creative way without worrying about the dominant practices of written assignments.

Nonetheless, when I asked Lisa if she considers her assignment as academic, she said that it is not academic enough. She believes that the academic language should be unbiased and objective similar to the language she had used in another assignment for another course. The assignment was a critical discoursal analysis of a video for which she used objective language and followed academic writing norms:

> Lisa: I feel like, you know, writing this [reflection journal]…was way different than writing …the multimodal analysis on a video by Taylor Swift. It was for me… very different. I stop sometimes to ask “how should I say this and this? but with [the reflection journal] my mind was flowing you know like my mind was just like.
>
> Researcher: Would it be easier if you did the same thing [free writing] in your critical analysis study?
>
> Lisa: I think it would be easier, but it's not what they're expecting from you, right? It's not what the community is expecting from you. So, I'm following the norms of the community (Lisa, personal communication, May 12th 2024).

Here Lisa is aware of the academic expectations which are contextual and based on the type of assignment she needs to submit. Contesting the academic norms of writing depends on the risk she is willing to take. Although reflective writing allows her to project her voice (Williams, 2009) without worrying about the academic discursive

Figure 10. Lisa's Reflective Journal with an Artistic Font and a Colorful Background

expectations, she believes that this type of writing does not afford her the opportunity to position herself as an academic writer. This is because it involves personal experiences and subjective language. Here it seems that objective and unbiased academic language help her build her discoursal self and perceived writer self through abiding by the dominant practices of writing academic research papers.

Unlike Lisa, Shirin feels that her reflective writing (i.e. her reading responses shared with me) was academic because she included references and other scholars' arguments to support her claims and suggested further research in one of her reading responses. Nonetheless, her view on challenging writing norms goes in line with Lisa's. She thinks that her position as a student whose first language is not English disallows her from contesting the academic norms because she believes that she would be laughed at if she did so. But still, being familiar with those norms makes it easier for her to write. In this sense, Shirin is aware of the expectations of the academic community

and attempts to build her writer identity in accordance with prevalent discursive practices and the available possibilities of selfhood.

In the same vein, Nadia attempts to carefully pay attention to her academic writing. This is because she does not want the reader to disapprove of her writing as being produced by a young school student:

> Researcher: Do you try to challenge academic writing norms?
>
> Nadia: No, I am not avoiding them because I don't want that people read my writing and say that it's like the writing of a person who is in the 5th grade or 6th grade or 12th grade. I want to improve it
>
> Researcher: But do you think it will be easier to write if those norms are not strictly followed?
>
> Nadia: It is easier when I'm writing. Sometimes I use free writing. For example, I'm writing my experiences from back home. So I always write what's going on there, or for women or for anyone or for the past, or what was going on with the Russians when they came to Afghanistan or when Americans came. So, I write about experiences. In the beginning. I was thinking to first think in Farsi and translate that in my mind and then writing in English. Now I'm thinking in English and I can write. So it's like a free writing so. I don't pay attention to grammar or anything Then after completing that part, then I work on its grammar. So. in that way it's easier because it doesn't block your mind and the memories that you want to write (Nadia, May 12th 2024, personal communication).

While Nadia believes that those norms make it difficult to write and hinder her flow of ideas, she is aware that she needs to abide by them to construct her academic writer identity. Therefore, she developed a strategy to improve her writing by writing freely without paying attention to how academic and accurate her writing is. Then, she can polish it academically and accurately.

Tara, on the other hand, takes a strict position on challenging the norms. She believes that it is dependent on context. She argues that writers should navigate different practices based on the expectations of the audience, who may have certain values, beliefs and perspectives that require certain writing practices. For example, she believes that a thesis, which is academically oriented, should strictly follow the academic norms which are the only valid venue for scholarly expression. Tara argues that the aim of contesting dominant writing practices in other meaning-making modes, such as poetry, is “to sell” the work . This may explain that challenging dominant writing practices

does not help her to position herself as an academic writer who is well-versed in its conventions.

Interestingly, Sarah appears to enjoy an academic environment where different modes of expression are allowed in her program and one of them is poetry. During her master's program, she had to make sure that her writing followed dominant academic writing norms. However, in her current PhD program, she is encouraged to take a critical stance of the conventions and approach knowledge through innovative modes of meaning making. She states that a student in her program submitted her dissertation in the form of a poem, a practice that Tara would consider unacademic. Sarah probably works in a more flexible environment than the other participants do, a situation that grants her more freedom to develop writer identity within the available possibilities of selfhood in the academic discourse. Moreover, unlike the other participants, her future self seems to be less confined by dominant discursive practices with broader available possibilities of selfhood.

5.4. Conclusion

Under one overarching theme (the weight of academic writing conventions), I analyzed in this chapter the data that students shared with me. The findings from the data collected from student participants underscore the challenges faced by multilingual graduate students as they navigate the complex landscape of academic conventions. They revealed that transition to graduate studies seems to vary among students whose autobiographical selves play a significant role in that transition. Moreover, the results showed that the students attempt to adapt their writing to meet the expectations of their instructors and programs, sometimes at the expense of expressing their true identities. More importantly, the study revealed a complex relationship with challenging academic norms. While students recognized the potential of challenging writing norms in voice empowerment, most of them viewed adhering to and mastering those norms as essential for their academic success. This highlights the pragmatic choices students made in navigating those norms and building their writer identities.

In Chapter Six, I will analyze the data that students shared with me under another overarching theme: search for resources to build voice.

Chapter 6.

Student Participants: Search for Resources to Build Voice

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will thematically analyze a second set of data from the interviews I conducted with the student participants. Under one overarching theme (search for resources to build voice), my analysis will be supported by thematic analysis of written assignments the students shared with me. I have divided the analysis in this chapter into two main sections: (1) *mimicry as a pathway to belonging* and (2) *feedback to provide room for voice*. My analysis will be guided by four main theoretical frameworks: the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street 1998, 2006; 2014), academic writer identity (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010) and my expansion of the framework, critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b), and the interactional metadiscourse model (Hyland, 2005, 2012).

6.2. Mimicry as a Pathway to belonging

Navigating academic literacies at the graduate level entails not only understanding knowledge, but also producing it, a process that involves issues of identity and voice (Tardy, 2005). Students need to understand the implicit practices in their chosen field to project their voices effectively and engage in meaningful communication with the reader (Clarence & McKenna, 2017; Hyland, 2002). To achieve this, they employ a repertoire of strategies that allow them to gain access to the academic community and work within the boundary of its expectations (Hyland, 2012).

One of the strategies that the student-participants utilize to learn the tacit methods of meaning making is mimicking the practices of other scholars in producing knowledge. Lisa, for example, abides by the rules of academic writing to be a member of the academic community. She believes that one way to build her authorial voice is through learning how to critique other scholarly work and present her own arguments.

She does that through reading different articles and books to figure out the dominant practices of arguing and build her own voice:

> I, like, download a bunch of research articles and things like that so that I could see how other people were writing and I could see how it flows. Then I guess like you start, like, learning from all of this until like you find your own voice, which is not that similar to anyone, but it's, like, you get a little bit from everything … I don't read everything because sometimes like you don't like stuff, I guess, I don't like some styles of writing. (Lisa, personal communication, May 12th, 2024).

Lisa's process involves selection and evaluation of texts that resonate with her own vision of what academic writing should look like. In other words, she is not uncritically copying other writers, but rather using their work to understand the writing norms, a process that eventually leads to learning how to critically engage with the literature and build her future writer self:

> I learn how the literature review should look like or this is how you would write a discussion of different authors, you know, because at the beginning I would write "This author says this and this author says that"…. But then I learned that it's like "This author says this, but on the contrary, this author says that and then I need to insert my voice (Lisa, personal communication, May 12th, 2024).

This strategy enabled Lisa to move from merely describing knowledge to producing through projecting her own voice.

Lisa further elaborates her understanding of critiquing other scholarly work by emphasizing politeness and civility:

> Researcher: How do you defend your arguments in your assignments?
>
> Lisa: I speak my mind, but try to do it, like, in a respectful way, right? If I don't agree with something you can like, you know, politely disagree with someone about something and you know we can have, like, different ideas and still it doesn't have to be, like, disrespectful. I just try to speak my mind. I have my own identity there, which is inevitable at the end.
>
> Researcher: Why do you think it's inevitable?
>
> Lisa: It's because, I don't know, it's a part of me. So, I think that if you're pretending to be someone else in academia or whatever, you know, then you stop being yourself. (Lisa, personal communication, May 12th, 2024).

This means that Lisa acknowledges the other perspectives that exist in the literature, and it is healthy to disagree with them. At the same time, it is significant for her to avoid "pretending to be someone else" and make sure that her unique voice manifests itself in her writing. Accordingly, having a critical and analytical stance would position her writing in the discourse and develop her respectable and authentic academic authorship (discoursal and authorial self).

This stance is evident in Lisa's reflective journal assignment below when she critiques ethnography as a method that might have ethical implications. While she acknowledges in her assignment the importance of employing ethnographic methods, such as interviews, she argues that ethnography might be extractive, and she supports her argument by citing a book chapter on decolonizing ethnography:

> …Consequently, once I get home, I start reading this chapter and I realize the ethical implications that doing an ethnography with homeless people would have. I learn that "The colonial strain of ethnographic research is extractive" because it "cracks open the oysters of other people's lives and harvests the rich goo within." (p. 7) So, the authors explain that decolonizing ethnography "requires more than just "giving back" to those whom anthropologists have studied, more than "engagement" in some general sense" (p. 7). Then, I understand how extractive it would be for me to go and interview this group of people, and then, just leave because, in all honesty "can I really make a change for these people?" I think to myself, and then I continue, "no, I wish I could, but I can't."

Lisa here is attempting to show that she is able to navigate different perspectives and position herself as a researcher who is legitimately able to take sides and present her critical evaluation of scholarly concepts (discoursal self). Her critique moves beyond simply restating the views of other authors; rather, she actively synthesizes her understanding of those issues with her own personal reflection.

Similar to Lisa, Nadia used the strategy of reading academic articles to learn how to voice her arguments. Nadia says that she projects her voice through placing her own arguments in the discussion section of her papers. She learned this strategy from reading scientific articles and books while she was doing research in her home country, Afghanistan. To her surprise, the same practice is followed in her current program. However, she believes that this should not be the case. She mentions that in other programs, such as mine, students are free to present their own perspectives in any section of the research paper. In her program, it seems that although prevalent writing

norms afford her the opportunity to build her authorial voice, the dominant practices of academic writing may contradict her beliefs and limit the construction of an identity she wishes to present.

Nadia described another goal of reading other academic work for the purpose of constructing her future self. Nadia's understanding of herself as a researcher appeared to be through mimicking the style of native English academic writers:

> When I read something, for example when I read an assignment of a person who's whose native language is not English, I can see the difference. So as the difference that it is not a native speaker. So, I want to succeed in that point, but when a person read my paper. Yeah, it's a fact that I'm not a native English speaker. That's not my writing. And you want to get to that point that when someone reads your writing, they can't tell the difference whether you are a native speaker or not (Nadia, personal communication, May 12th 2024).

Here, Nadia believes in the idea that she has to "go native" (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 37) in order to gain membership in the academic community. She views her future writing transcending the non-native status to earn recognition and legitimacy of her voice as an academic writer.

Stephanie, in contrast, suggested that copying certain writing practices may not be helpful. She explained that during her master's program she had to follow certain disciplinary patterns and structures of argumentation which would not allow her to develop her sense of being an academic writer. Her experience limited her ability to include her personal perspective and discouraged her from self-mentioning herself (discoursal and authorial self). Therefore, she described the academic English she learned in that program as being "cold" because it did not allow her to exercise her agency. To elaborate on her view, she sent me a link to a video which shows a hammer is being forged and the result is the same hammer. This is indicative of how she had to follow the same writing practices of other scholars with no possibility to exercise her agency. In other words, the sociocultural and institutional context determined her possibilities of selfhood.

However, Stephanie described her experience in her current PhD program as one that had contributed to developing her academic voice. She feels she is a member of the community where she can project her voice:

> So I got to see how other people were writing in multilateral multiliteracy was, which was really fun and also how they writing about philosophical things or theories or frameworks or whatever. Also learning about different research approaches how people write, for example in critical ethnographic paper versus other type of papers is also really different... I want to see who is writing in a style I connect to maybe those are the kind of academic writings that we weren't exposed to in our our Masters or ….maybe …. we didn't know how to read academic works (Stephanie, personal communication, May 12th 2024).

Now that Stephanie has read diverse examples of academic work and she has been exposed to different writing styles in various areas of research, she describes being able to compare how different scholars voice their opinions and how to critique other perspectives (discoursal self). She also describes gaining knowledge of the meaning-making practices of different writing genres. She thus chooses the writing practices that fit her academic goals in her academic community to construct her academic writer identity. However, Stephanie explained that she still feels that she faces difficulty with positioning her voice in her papers. She thinks that it is not easy to strike a balance between her authorial voice and that of other scholars. This means that she attempts to fit in with the Western way of argumentation where students need to critically engage with the literature and have their own positioning. One related pedagogical practice that she benefited from was when one of her instructors would deconstruct scholarly articles and make explicit how authors developed their arguments.

Stephanie's video resonated with Livia's perspective on academic writing. Livia takes a more extreme stance on academic writing than Stephanie. She believes that scholars follow the same patterns of writing practices and in principle they are reproducing the same generic structures where there is no room for individual identity unless they connect their writing with their personal experiences:

> I think that's pretty generic for all papers that you write on something …For example, in one of the courses, let's say, which is the sort of multimodal analysis which was crazy in its own way, you have never done multimodal analysis and you suddenly do it for the assignment...I have no idea what I'm doing … Sometimes it is actually happening … I hope I'm doing something more or less right ... I just read some papers how to do that …so I guess in a sense, sometimes you just follow this pattern. For example, if I'm doing a multimodal analysis analyzing, let's say, a certain picture or photo or something and like, yeah, "this shows us this because based on that"… This is actually what they wanted to say. So it was mostly, I guess, typical... I think it's called premise-conclusion or something like … "because of this I think that mostly ohh this reading supports this" … I think it's pretty

> generic in the sense and I think there isn't much of an identity unless I can relate to it somehow …For example, … if I'm analyzing a video again, doing multimodal analysis on the video which talks about… transgender people and I'm transgender, I'm not, but, yeah, let's imagine then … I'd be more invested and there will be more connection related to my identity. But otherwise I think it's just a very generic pattern (Livia, personal communication, May 10th 2024).

It seems that Livia differentiates between her personal voice and academic voice. She showcases her academic one through mastering and reproducing the same "generic pattern" that other scholars employ since, according to her, all academic work is based on the premise-conclusion philosophy of argumentation. In other words, copying the epistemological stance of other scholars, she positions herself as an insider in the academic community. However, her personal voice is presented in her writing when she relates it to her personal life and experiences. To emphasize her perspective, she gives an example of a multilingual scholar, Ryuko Kubota, whose scholarly work showcases her authentic identity since it is about racialized multilinguals.

Livia strikes another example to prove her argument. She assumes that she is analyzing a video on being transgender. She believes that if the video does not relate to her personal life, then her true identity cannot be projected. This example may indicate that her personal values and beliefs could be disguised by an inauthentic, or fake, discoursal self which she attempts to construct as an academic writer. Moreover, through such a discoursal self, she attempts to convey an impression that the audience expects from her (perceived writer self) even though it may not be the one she would like to convey. This is underscored by her repeated assertion that writers ultimately write for their readers. A strategy that she employed in her assignment may represent her view:

> **Imagine** a situation: you are walking down the street and suddenly see a sign on the shop. **What does it say? What does it show?** What languages can you see on it? Who put it there and why? We may not always realize it, but linguistic landscape is constantly around us …(my emphasis)

In this extract, Livia is interacting with the reader through using directives (e.g. *imagine a situation*) and questions. Through this engagement, she attempts to position herself as a writer who is able to investigate issues that the reader might be interested in. When I asked her why she used these engagement devices, she replied that she read it in one of the articles and thought they would attract the reader's attention:

> Livia: I think I was inspired by something I read in another article related to linguistic landscape. They sort of were talking about something similar. I'm like, I mean, I didn't actually copy it, but they used sort of similar approach and just took it a step further, I guess that I just tried to follow a certain pattern that I saw somewhere to catch readers attention…
>
> Researcher: Who are you asking here? Who are you addressing here?
>
> Livia: I guess this is sort of rhetorical questions, which do not really require the answer… I think I am trying to include the reader and merge myself with the audience (Livia, personal communication, March 16th, 2024)

Although Livia here is acknowledging that she is reproducing certain academic patterns, a practice that she criticized before, she would appear to be constructing her academic writer identity through employing that practice which is approved by the academic community.

However, Livia attempts to use the process of passive reproduction of writing practices in a positive way. She says that she tries to choose new research topics that she has never written about, such as the linguistic landscaping assignment she submitted to me. When she does that, she relies on her critical thinking skills that she learned at school (autobiographical self) and reads papers related to the topic to familiarize herself with the different theories and engage with scholarly perspectives on it (discoursal self). She says that unlike some big academics who repeat what they did years ago, she always attempts to construct original arguments. Here Livia seems to be aware of the available legitimate writing practices, but she employs them to exercise her agency through her original contribution to the literature to build her authorial self. This might indicate that her understanding of being an academic writer stipulates commitment to advancing knowledge. As such, her true authorial voice is presented in her original contributions to the topic she is interested in.

Employing the autobiographical self is a strategy that is also used by Sarah. According to Sarah, her program encourages students to “push back” the academic norms and have their own voice:

> Researcher: When you read an article, do you try to… follow the same style or to follow the same norm so that you sound academic and your writing sounds academic?
>
> Sarah: I have to say that while I did my masters, I tried really hard to do that, but also to my personal surprise is that in in my current program we

> are more encouraged to have her own voice instead of following a certain kind of norm. So, our program, like at least in my personal experience and I believe many of my colleagues, have similar experiences that our program is kind of trying to, you know, push back the norms and have our own voices. So, yeah, maybe the basics like the basics are there… we're, like, not really grappling with the norms right now…because we're encouraged this way. I try to bring in more of my own my personal voice to make my work more authentic. This is my practice so instead of following a certain type of norm, certain type of fixed norm, I kind of, you know, try to follow what aligns with my research. For example, if my biggest philosophy that I like to refer to is Taoism, then I probably would align my writing more to that style instead of, you know, the fixed, or that we're not that we're supposed to write. But I'm just trying to do my research more authentic, because if I'm going to quote some classic Eastern philosophy, I would want it to be authentic instead of, you know, transplant into a Western fixed norm (Sarah, personal communication, April 21st 2024).

Sarah views that her academic voice is presented through making her research "authentic" and not following fixed academic practices. She expressed the opinion that the authenticity of her research is achieved through exercising her agency in incorporating her own cultural, linguistic and philosophical resources and aligning her writing style with Chinese meaning-making practices. In other words, using the "western fixed norm" of writing would deprive her of doing research that reflects her personal values and beliefs. Here, Sarah is using her autobiographical self to construct her discoursal self and at the same time to build her future writer self as a researcher who employs a writing style distinct from the western dominant one.

6.3. Feedback to Provide Room for Voice

One of the main tenets of the Academic Literacies approach is demystifying academic writing norms for students to allow them to build their voices. This could be achieved through constructive feedback (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006) to give students the opportunity to navigate different disciplinary meaning-making practices conducive to knowledge construction (Lillis, 2003). In the interviews with the student participants, I attempted to investigate students' perceptions on feedback and how they use it as a source to construct their academic writer identities.

Stephanie admits she still has problems in academic writing, mainly in areas related to coherence. Generally, the feedback she received during her graduate studies

(master's degree and her current PhD program) included general comments on how her ideas are mixed up:

> Stephanie: …actually like most of my other feedback I received on my academic writing is "You need to get to the point in the content" or "You need to work on the content" or "Your ideas are mixed up." It's always about the cohesion of my ideas. So, I think that translates from Spanish academic writing… (Stephanie, personal communication, May 10th 2024)

She attributes such general feedback to her instructors' unawareness of how her Spanish background affects her English meaning-making practices. She says these instructors "maybe are not super interculturally savvy." Another justification for these comments is related to the high expectations of graduate students. She says, "I don't know why they they're not more direct with the people. Maybe again because they think you're expected to already know that." This probably explains her view that English is "cold" and straightforward unlike her first language, Spanish, in which she can include a lot of details to convey her message.

However, Stephanie narrates an experience with one of her PhD instructors, who used constructive dialogic feedback to scaffold her assignment:

> Stephanie: for instance, John [her instructor] has like a lot of intercultural knowledge, so he knows where me and my classmate were coming from, and he made me do my assignment maybe three times. He just said what all my professors have told me like I need to get to the point in the content I need to work on the content…
>
> Researcher: Did you receive any feedback that your academic writing is not up to the standards?
>
> Stephanie: I guess in my first semester I did receive feedback that helped me like not specifically told me this is how you do it, but just like the feedback about my content made me make those connections and understand where this feedback was coming from. So, with the feedback about my content it helped me like rearrange everything. I was like "ohh. OK. Yeah, he's right. This looks way better." I didn't have that experience in my second semester. I don't know why they were not more direct with the feedback. Maybe again because they think you're expected to already know that …I wish in my second semester I had received more like direct [feedback] back instead of just, I don't know, generalized one.
>
> Researcher: With John, it was detailed feedback?
>
> Stephanie: It was more direct with John…It helped me to make sense of everything… He used Word Track Changes and… I've never used [it]

> before because I've never had a dialogue with feedback. I submitted like I think a different document and he told me “no, no, you need to use the other one so I can see like your improvement.” …I wasn't expecting that. I was just expecting the typical comment work. But then once I got how like the interaction was, everything was easier (Stephanie, personal communication, May 10th, 2024).

Dialogic feedback helped Stephanie to demystify the discursive academic expectations that Stephanie needs to meet. Unlike the generalized pieces of feedback she received, dialogic feedback showed her that the dominant meaning-making practices were different from those used in her first language. In other words, it helped her understand the epistemological differences in argumentation between English and Spanish. Through dialogic feedback (Lillis, 2001, Sutton, 2012), Stephanie’s instructor seemed to consider feedback as an ongoing social practice (Nicol, 2014; Price et al., 2011; Tuck 2012; Winstone & Carless, 2019) that can contribute to building her writer identity.

The importance of dialogic feedback was also iterated by Lisa. She believes that feedback should be in the form of a discussion:

> Lisa: I feel like feedback should always be like, you know, a discussion…
>
> In the first year in the masters, I would take everything as it is, but then I
>
> realized if I did that, it was not gonna be my voice anymore. It was gonna be my professor’s voice…
>
> Researcher: Do you feel now in the PhD that the professors are more relaxed …and are more responsive when it comes to your own identity? Or they are very strict?
>
> Lisa: I don't really know what they're thinking, honestly, because all of the feedback has always been through screen. So it's kind of hard to know what they're thinking.
>
> Researcher: What do you mean by “through screen”?
>
> Lisa: It's like I send that Word document and they send it back …Back in Mexico, I would sit with the professor. It would be more like a talk, like “what do you mean by this?” … “Explain to me your point of view” And I would be like “No, but this is what I want to say” … There was a lot of more interaction with the student…I actually felt like I was learning because, you know, like sometimes things can be like misunderstood…The PhD has been more like professor send you feedback,… but the student-teacher interaction is not as good as I experienced back in Mexico (Lisa, personal communication, May 12th, 2024).

For Lisa, dialogic feedback empowers her when she negotiates her perspectives with her instructors. While she is aware that there are specific discursive expectations which can be disclosed through interaction with the instructors, that interaction creates a space for her to validate her views. In addition, she can avoid any misunderstanding due to epistemological differences, project her voice and learn the appropriate discursive practices. So, unlike the one-way feedback which would obscure her voice, dialogue with her instructors offers her an opportunity to be an academic writer who is legitimate enough to contribute to knowledge production.

Lisa, then, explains that the purpose of dialogic feedback is sometimes misunderstood. She thinks that if she initiates a dialogue with the reader of her assignment, they might think that she is doubting their judgement or knowledge:

> Lisa: I don't like it when people think that I'm questioning what they're saying. It's not that I'm questioning. It's just that I want to understand…because it's been "ohh, you should say this."… But why? Why should I say that?... I am not doubting your knowledge or anything like that. It is just that I want I need to know I want to understand how it works so that in the future I can just do it by myself because if I don't understand, then I'm gonna make the same mistake (Lisa, personal communication, May 12th, 2024).

In this extract, which aligns with her earlier view that learning academic writing is an ongoing process, Lisa is aware that making mistakes is conducive to learning. For her, to avoid making the same mistakes in the future is dependent on dialogic feedback. This type of feedback should be a healthy, nonjudgemental interaction that contributes to improving her academic writing and to building her future writer self.

Similarly, Livia believes that feedback is helpful as it makes her instructors' expectations explicit:

> Livia: I don't remember having rubrics honestly, and yeah, of course I tried to follow unless there wasn't much to follow. Mostly you do that by showing your draft to the professor and asking "Is this what you were looking for? Am I like going in the direction that you thought I would be going in?"… I guess the downside probably sometimes they tell you about these things when they actually read your paper, because sometimes you just do not even realize them … I think it would probably be better if they did that the criteria a bit more explicit… because then you kind of you have already written it and then they tell you "Oh actually you need to write it in a completely different way." Like OK, I wish I knew this before… I think it's sort of when you are an experienced researcher, educator, like a

> professor… then I guess the way you see it and your students see it can be different …
>
> Researcher: So, what's the solution for that?
>
> Livia: Then giving you detailed feedback I guess (personal communication, May 10th, 2024)

Livia here seems to be aware that the gap between herself being a student writer and her instructors being experienced writers may make her instructors' expectations unclear. This gap makes submitting a successful assignment contingent upon intuitive understanding of those unspoken expectations. To bridge the gap, she seeks feedback to negotiate those expectations and understand appropriate academic practices. Her suggestion for "giving detailed feedback" and making "the criteria a bit more explicit" aligns with the focus of Academic Literacies on demystifying the academic rules of the game (Harwood & Hadley, 2004, Lillis, 2001).

Seeking clarification from instructors was also iterated by Shirin. She confirmed that she needed explicit feedback because she wanted to check that she was meeting her instructors' expectations:

> I need feedback and I want to double check and I have to make sure that everything is OK. I most of the time send drafts to my instructors and I want them to like check my work before I submit it and like they need to check that I'm following everything that they want (Shirin, personal communication, April 28th, 2024).

Here Shirin attempts to learn the appropriate practices to gain membership in the academic community. However, she emphasizes that while feedback should be encouraging as well as constructive, it should not have any impact on her assignment mark. Shirin explained her view by comparing her experience with two instructors who adopted different approaches to feedback. The first one was John, who gave her A+ with detailed feedback and on the two assignments she shared with me and the second one was Cindy, who marked a different assignment with A- and provided general feedback:

> Shirin:…with John, I received my best grades in his class, but I received many corrections from him as well. Like he gave me feedback on everything, but at the same time it didn't affect my overall score. So, I was like "he's trying to help me, so I am listening to him." But with, for example, Cindy as like she's not trying to help me. She's just trying to find a way to deduct marks. So, I don't know …I didn't feel like she wants me to, like, improve.

> Researcher: You felt like feedback was not related to the mark that you got and that they were separate things.
>
> Shirin: Yeah, exactly. So, for example, if you look at the paper, you see, like, many corrections on it, but still the grade is A+. But with Cindy, for example, I had two, or three feedback on it. And based on that, my overall grade was, for example A-.
>
> Researcher: So, you prefer more detailed feedback.
>
> Shirin: Yeah, exactly. So I was like "OK, so you didn't like this, but what about my writing in general?" (personal communication, April 28th, 2024).

As can be seen, Shirin is advocating John's approach to detailed feedback that guided her to build her confidence, agency and academic writer identity in her new academic environment but did not jeopardize her academic success.

Shirin's empowerment is signalled in one of the assignments she sent me. She shared that assignment which she submitted in a course taught by John. She ended it with the question: "Will I be able to facilitate this experience for my students?" I asked her about the reason for using this question and her answer was:

> At that time I had that question in my mind, maybe I was testing some hypothesis: What will happen if I add a question that I have in mind in my writing? What would be the instructor's reaction to this question? …What if I include my own question in this writing, how would John react to this? Really it was like I was testing some ideas I had in mind at that time (Shirin, personal communication, April 28th, 2024).

Shirin was exercising her agency through trying out new meaning-making practices. Although using questions as engagement markers (Hyland, 2005) is common in academic writing, this was a new experience for her. This could probably be attributed to the safe space that John created through his constructive feedback that Shirin would listen to, as she mentioned earlier. She knew that this would not have any negative consequences on her mark; therefore, she felt that she was "somebody" who can employ new writing practices to position herself.

Another experience about the benefit of explicit feedback was with another instructor during her master's program at IWU. That instructor taught her how to project her voice explicitly in her writing:

> Shirin: I remember the first time I wrote a reading response in Pamela's class. The feedback she gave me was very useful. I think at that time I understood that what I should do. Well before that I didn't have any idea.
>
> Researcher: Can you be more specific? Like what kind of feedback? Like how, how useful? Why was it useful?
>
> Shirin: I remember she explicitly asked me to include my voice. I cannot remember her exact sentence. But she wrote something like "What about you? What do you think? Where are you standing? What about your opinion?" Some like that and I was like still not clear. I remember the session after I asked her if she wants me to like, write about my opinion or if she wants me to, like talk about my opinion. She said "No, I want you to include it in your next reading response." And I was like "Really, can I do that? And she was like "Yes!." And then I remember at that time we were reading an article in her class as well. I am a somebody and well most of the international students are like nobody. And then when they are coming here in Canada, they feel like they are somebody and it was like so coincidental because I started thinking that "OK, this is what they want us. This is how different this situation is. How different this academic environment is." (personal communication, April 28th, 2024).

Shirin felt empowered when she figured out the dominant writing practices and how she could navigate her voice and exercise her agency in her new academic environment. Providing feedback in the form of questions and initiating a dialogue with her created a space to learn how to negotiate her future writer self in her subsequent assignments and how as an international student she can be "somebody." That is, her voice can be legitimate enough and validated by the academic community when she learns the acceptable writing practices.

Tara was also in favor of feedback that clears up her instructors' expectations. She values submitting drafts as it helps her succeed academically:

> I value a lot the experience where professors welcome drafts when the professor asks you for the draft, then I feel comfortable and easy because I know that after my first draft, I will have the feedback and I'll have the feel of what and how I'm doing in my writing. Am I on the track? What aspect of my writing I need to improve on stuff? If there are drafts going back and forth between the instructor and the student, then usually the writing I do gets a high mark. But if my identity, sometimes my way of writing doesn't suit with the professors, sometimes we don't understand each other (Tara, personal communication, April 29th, 2024).

Tara is aware that a one-time type of feedback may create misunderstandings between her and the instructors because her identity or understanding of the appropriate academic writing practices may not align with her instructors'. That is, there might be

epistemological differences in knowledge production. Therefore, dialogue through back-and-forth drafts allows her to avoid those misunderstandings and to get high marks. That dialogic feedback resulted in a high grade (A) for the assignment she shared with me. Tara's view resonates with French's (2018) that summative assessment does not take into consideration the complex nature of academic writing, which should be approached through an ongoing, interactive type of feedback (Nicol, 2014; Price et al., 2011; Tuck 2012; Winstone & Carless, 2019).

In the same vein, Sarah appreciates iterative feedback that opens up new spaces for her to voice her arguments and perspectives. She believes that having conversations with her instructors mitigates power relationships and puts her on a more equal status with her instructors. She explains her perspective by drawing a comparison between the feedback approach of her instructors at IWU and that of her instructors in China:

> Sarah: Professors here give different kind of feedback than the professors in China.
>
> Researcher: Oh!, how different?
>
> Sarah: So usually the professors here would tend to like my according to my experience, instead of having assertive statements, they would ask questions like "Why do you make this claim? And how do you prove it?" instead of saying that "Ohh! I don't think this is a solid one, like, this is solid claim." Well, in China, my experience with the professors is that professors usually give you give us very assertive statements. Yeah, they would say that "look, this is not right. This is not the way you should be writing this point. Maybe you should try that." Or even more assertive like "Try that."
>
> Researcher: OK, so it was not that like dialogic?
>
> Sarah: No, no, it's not like conversational. No, it's more like an order.
>
> Researcher: And how did you feel like back then when you had that kind of feedback and how do you feel when you get like the conversational feedback?
>
> Sarah: Back in China?
>
> Reearcher: Yeah. Back in China and here in your program.
>
> Sarah: OK, I didn't know things could be different. Like while I was in China because, I did my K-12 in China as well and teachers were always like that. So, I thought that was a way that teachers deal with students, you know, like a kind of hierarchical way of communication. Well, when I came here,

> I found that ohh there actually are different ways of communicating with like teacher and student interaction. It can be more equal. And I liked the questions because they trigger more, they inspired me more and they kind of give me more things to think about on my own instead of, you know, just take whatever they give me (Personal communication, April 21st, 2024).

Sarah highlights a stark contrast between the assertive, directive style of feedback in her Chinese academic experience and the more "conversational" approach to feedback in her current PhD program. In her experience, the Chinese style reflects a hierarchical power dynamic where the instructor's perspective is unquestioned, and the student is a passive learner. It seems that she internalized that the hierarchical style of communication was the only way instructors interact with students. That resulted in building an academic writer identity that limited her agency while the "more equal" interaction in her current program promotes it.

The "conversational" feedback Sarah is experiencing aligns with Academic Literacies (Street & Lea, 2006, 1998) as it provides her with the resources to build her on academic writer identity. These resources are supported by an academic environment that does not strictly adhere to academic writing norms. Sarah asserts that her current PhD program creates space to explore different meaning-making practices:

> So, our program, like at least in my personal experience and I believe many of my colleagues, have the similar experiences that our program is kind of trying to, you know. push back the norms and have our own voices. At the same time, we're, like, not really grappling with the norms right now … You know, we are offered with more options in academic writing, such as storytelling and poetry writing (Sarah, personal communication, April 21st, 2024).

"[P]ushing back the norms" and the ability to explore different writing approaches, such as storytelling, allows Sarah to find a voice and style that truly reflects her intellectual perspective. This is supported by "conversational feedback" that alleviates power dynamics and builds her individual agency.

Nadia's understanding of feedback resonates with that of the other student participants in the sense that it should make the appropriate writing practices explicit for her. She differentiates between two types of feedback that she wishes to receive: the first focuses on content and the second concerns style and surface features. While she has received positive feedback from her instructors on the content of her writing, only one instructor gave her feedback that accounted for both types in the first semester of

her current PhD program. The reason for that lack of feedback on grammar, she assumes, is that it is not part of the instructor's job; it is the responsibility of the students to seek every available source to improve the surface features of their writing:

> Researcher: Do you prefer them [instructors] to give feedback on grammar, on how to do things, how to write academically, or just give feedback on content? Which one is better? Which one is more effective?
>
> Nadia: I think that giving feedback on grammar is good, but I'm not expecting from them … I know that it's a lot for an instructor in a in a class to see your content … because here all of the classes are international students, and I think it's a lot and it's not their job. Specifically in grad school we are expecting that the students should be good in writing,
>
> Researcher: And whose job is it?
>
> Nadia: It is depend on the students. They have to struggle. They have to get courses (Personal communication, May 12th, 2024).

Nadia stresses her need for feedback to improve all aspects of her writing, including grammar. Her view aligns with Lawrence and Zawacki's (2019) that "low-order concerns" (e.g., sentence-level features) are as important as the "higher-order concerns (e.g., forming arguments) to construct students' writing identities. The fact that she is not expecting feedback from her instructors on her grammar indicates a prevalent discursive practice of focusing on macro-level concerns over the micro-level ones in graduate writing pedagogy (Turner (2019). Moreover, the word "struggle" is significant here. It suggests that academic writing is not a straightforward process but involves challenges that students need to address. This aligns with the idea that academic writing is a process of negotiating complex discursive practices (Street & Lea, 2006).

The idea of "struggle" may also indicate the unavailability of enough writing support for Nadia, who needed to take individual initiatives to improve. As she stated earlier and evidenced by her comment on the assignment she shared with me, she believes that her writing is characterized by simple language, which might not qualify it to be academic. Therefore, she attempts to find support and explicit feedback on her style and surface features. For example, she was, as an exception, enrolled for one semester in an academic literacy course designed for undergraduate students at IWU. She thinks that the course was helpful in providing her with more insights into academic writing because the facilitator would give her detailed feedback on her style as well as content. She requested to be enrolled for a second semester, but her request was rejected

because of the policy of the course that does not accept graduate students. Therefore, she later attended workshops and had one-on-one sessions with a facilitator to review her assignments although she says they were not as effective as the academic literacy course she had taken.

Moreover, she attended writing retreats organized by the Faculty of Education at IWU. She believes that those retreats were helpful to some extent as they provide her with space to work on her research proposal. However, they were not helpful enough to improve her writing as no one provided explicit feedback on her writing:

> Nadia: When I started to go to these writing retreats in person, that was helpful because at the beginning, they said to us that you can work on your writing and give you yourself a specific time for writing. And it was good, but not much because everyone is different, so I needed some people to help me (Personal communication, May 12th, 2024).

Here, Nadia is aware that as a graduate student, she faces challenges that might be different from those of the other students. While the writing retreats dedicated time for her to work on her research proposal, it did not help her to fully address her individual needs. She articulates her need for additional support to actively engage with and adapt to the academic writing demands to build her academic writer identity. This could be achieved through explicit feedback from academic writing experts:

> Researcher: What kind of people? Who do you want to help you?
>
> Nadia: … I think that it's not enough that you are giving people the space and time... those who are organizing from the research hub or from the library that they have these programs, they should give us some information on how to improve our writings?...I didn't see any changes in myself when I used the retreats
>
> Reasearcher: Who was giving you feedback on your writing in [those retreats]?
>
> Nadia: They didn't give us feedback. …
>
> Researcher: You just want feedback from maybe from an instructor, from an academic writing expert?
>
> Nadia: …Yeah, from instructors …For example in the next writing retreat, If I go, I want to suggest them if it's OK. But for example, they're inviting those who graduated nearly, it's a good idea and some of these decision maybe they invite some experts if he or she is a graduate student, if or he is an instructor that know much about the writing and give us the feedback

> and also give us talk about the issues that we are facing. So in this way you will improve (Personal communication, May 12th, 2024).

Nadia understands the values of writing support, but she lacks access to a specific type of support that allows her to navigate the complexities of graduate academic writing. She desires structured instruction and expert-led feedback, which the writing retreats and other support initiatives she attended do not seem to offer. Her explicit demand for "information on how to improve our writing" may indicate a mismatch between the literacies offered at IWU and the literacies she is lacking.

This mismatch is demonstrated in Nadia's use of an external source of writing support, which is generative language models (AI) and the internet. She uses them to improve her grammar and linguistic choices to make her simple writing more academic:

> I'm using the Grammarly to check the grammar…and it is a good teacher, I think, because seeing that you are understanding that next time I have to write this instead of this in the grammar…Maybe there are lots of words for one thing, for one specific things, but I use the one that I know and when I check in the Internet and I use what are the other words, the synonyms for these words and I see different words and then I use that sometimes …(Nadia, personal communication, May 12th, 2024)

Nadia's employment of AI and the internet demonstrates her active engagement to negotiate different literacy resources and strategies to achieve her writing goals. It also indicates her agency in her approach to academic writing. She does not passively accept the lack of support being offered in her university, but rather she actively seeks out resources to gain membership as a legitimate academic writer in her academic community. AI for her is not only a tool, but also a "teacher" providing her with feedback that her institution may not offer. Her view resonates with Anson's (2024) view that AI can help students to improve their academic writing skills through, for example, identifying grammatical errors in their academic writing.

However, Nadia is not uncritically adopting AI tools. She is aware that heavy reliance on them may obscure her voice:

> Most of the students I saw that they're using ChatGPT for for writing, I think it's it's a good tool for helping you how to write. But I saw that some of the students are writing their papers on that, so it's not you, it's the AI. That right thing for you…I'm using also the AI like Grammarly or grammar and also ask my questions that if I face any problem in writing from AI but I'm not using AI to write to me an introduction or to write to me a discussion so

> I think if we have these facilities, why should students use their ChatGPT for writing them (Nadia, personal communication, May 12th, 2024).

Nadia is aware of the limitations of AI. She shows concern about the excessive use of AI, which may hinder her in constructing her writer identity in that it may not help her establish her own authorial voice. So, academic writing for her is not about generating information, but also producing original ideas, conducive to building an academic identity. Therefore, she does not seek help from AI to write her assignments. Nadia's view seems to align with Livia's who stated, "[AI] can make [writing] overly academic, which may not look very natural." In other words, Livia is aware that using AI may create a writer identity that does not represent her authentic voice.

Interestingly, some other student participants, who have different perspectives on incorporating AI in their writing, have employed it for feedback on their writing's surface features. For example, Lisa has consulted AI because she realized that her "grammar was not as strong as [she] thought" and AI helped her pinpoint her weaknesses. As a result, her sentence structure gradually improved. In the same vein, Shirin has used it to check the correctness of her sentences while Sarah has benefited from it in improving her academic vocabulary. Tara states that she employs it because she still has difficulty in areas related to choosing the appropriate theoretical framework(s) to defend her arguments. However, while Stephanie and Shirin do not see any negative impacts from using AI, Sarah and Tara views it as causing lack of confidence and over-reliance if used excessively. Lisa believes that it may provide false information. These experiences indicate that the student participants view AI as a resource that can provide them with constructive feedback on their academic writing though they seem to have different opinions on its limitations.

6.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I highlighted the experience of students' construction of their academic writer identity through analyzing data in light of mimicry and feedback. The findings revealed that mimicking the style of other scholars served as a strategy for students to understand academic writing conventions and to start their pathway to academic belonging. Dialogic feedback emerged as another resource to demystify those conventions and navigate disciplinary discourses as well as instructors' expectations.

However, AI appeared as a potential resource for students to compensate for lack of adequate feedback or writing support in their academic environment.

In Chapter Seven, I will summarize and discuss the findings in relation to the research questions. I will also suggest pedagogical practices, discuss the research limitations and provide future research recommendations.

Chapter 7.

Discussion and Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

In this study, I explored the complex experiences of international multilingual graduate students as they navigate academic writing in a Canadian university. I sought to understand how they negotiate their identities, the strategies they employ, and the extent to which their perceptions align with dominant discourses and instructors' perspectives. Drawing on the Academic Literacies (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006, 2014), the framework of academic writer identity (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010) and my extension of it, critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b; Cherryholmes,1988; Pennycook, 1997), and Hyland's (2005, 2012) interactional metadiscourse model, I will synthesize the findings and discuss how they addressed the research questions. I will also discuss key pedagogical implications. Then, I will highlight the limitations of this study and provide recommendations for future research.

7.2. Identity Negotiation in the Contested Space of Academic Writing

The first research question centered on how international multilingual graduate students negotiate their identities in academic writing. The study aligns with the current understanding that this negotiation is not a straightforward process of assimilation but a dynamic, ongoing struggle within the contested space of discourse (Block, 2006; Hall, 1996; Ivanič, 1998; Jenkins, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006). As seen in the experiences of student participants, the transition to graduate studies varies among them. It involves a complex interplay of different identity aspects (Burgess & Ivanič 2010): past experiences (autobiographical self), present academic demands (discoursal self, authorial self), available possibilities of selfhood, and future aspirations (future writer self, introduced in this study). Moreover, addressing these aspects, the student participants employed different strategies in their writing. This feeds into answering the second research question which examined how students strategically employ interactional metadiscourse features (Hyland, 2005, 2012) as well as other resources to

construct their identities as novice researchers within dominant academic discourses. In the following sections, I will discuss the intricate dynamics of these identity aspects and the strategies the student participants used to build them.

7.2.1. Influence of Autobiographical Self

Situating the autobiographical self in the mesolevel time (weeks, months, years) (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010) indicates that this self is not simply a repertoire of past experiences, but also a negotiation between those experiences and the present discursive demands of academic writing. The study results show that student participants' past educational, linguistic and cultural backgrounds significantly shaped their initial approaches to academic writing and their positioning in the new academic environment. For instance, Livia's and Tara's past academic journeys have positively contributed to the understanding of meaning-making practices dominant in their current graduate studies at IWU, and Lisa's academic background in Mexico made her feel comfortable with her academic writing.

Nadia's employment of observation techniques, learned in Afghanistan, positively impacted her approach to her assignment and allowed her to situate herself as a qualified researcher. She also utilized her multilingual resources to improve her academic writing by making rhetorical contrasts between the languages she speaks and English. Similarly, Shirin drew upon her professional experience as well as her cultural and linguistic background to include personal anecdotes and perspectives from Persian scholars to support her arguments in her assignments. This finding aligns with Canagarajah's (2002) assertion that multilingual writers bring pre-existing practices and experiences from other communities of practice into their new academic settings. It also resonates with the view that multilinguals are able to engage with their linguistic repertoire to meet their communicative needs (Breidbach, 2003; Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2009; Katsarova, 2022; Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2013; Wright, 2000).

However, the study shows that the autobiographical self can also be a site of tension, particularly in relation to conflicting epistemologies. As noted by proponents of Academic Literacies (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010, 2012; Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Lehman, 2020; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007), academic writing is

deeply embedded in ideologies and values. For example, several student participants reported being discouraged from using subjective language in their past academic journeys whereas the new academic setting provided room to include their personal voices. This tension between their past academic norms and the present ones is a manifestation of what Ivanič (1998) and Burgess and Ivanič (2010) called 'available possibilities of selfhood' which are presented in different contexts. It also marks a contestation in knowledge production that students need to navigate (Canagarajah & Jerskey, 2009; Lea, 2004) to learn new rhetorical moves dominant in their new academic environment (Hyland, 2012, 2018b).

The student-participants' adaptation to the new discursive demands, therefore, seemed to be significantly varied. For example, Shirin reported feeling guilty when she was first asked by her instructor to use "I" as a stance marker (Hyland, 2005, 2012) at IWU while Sarah and Tara felt empowered when they started using that marker. Moreover, Shirin reported that she felt the need to start learning academic writing from scratch when she began her studies at IWU whereas Nadia enrolled in an undergraduate literacy course to improve her academic writing. Similarly, Stephanie attributed her current academic writing challenges to the ineffectiveness of her previous education. These differing reactions contradict the dominant perspective that graduate students have already mastered academic writing (Simpson, 2016). This presumption was iterated in interviews with some student-participants, such as Nadia, Livia, Sarah as well as instructor participants, such as Ashley. Moreover, based on these reactions, the study results align with the Academic Literacies (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006, 2014; Lea, 2004; Lillis, 2014) proposition that the acculturation process into academic discourses is a complex one.

7.2.2. Building authorial and discoursal self

According to Burgess and Ivanič (2010), in the moment of writing (microgenetic time) the discoursal self refers to the values, beliefs and sense of being of a writer that are strategically and consciously presented in the act of writing while the self as author concerns the extent to which writers project their authoritativeness in that moment. These selves are intrinsically linked and operate within certain possibilities of selfhood as well as dominant values and power dynamics in institutional discourses. The study results reveal that multilingual graduate students make deliberate choices to build those

selves. It demonstrates that these choices represent strategic compliance[2], agency as well as suppression.

The first choice showing compliance was students' strategy to copy rhetorical moves found in scholarly work. They adopted this strategy to gain credibility and build their discoursal and authorial selves. This strategy shows their awareness of the perceived norms within their academic communities. For example, Lisa and Nadia's active search for research articles to read and learn the appropriate practices for argumentation indicates an effort to understand what counts as "good" writing while Livia's reproduction of the "generic pattern" scholars use serves her pragmatic goals to succeed. I argue that the students here are not mere imitators, but rather they attempt to construct their discoursal and authorial selves in accordance with the accepted conventions in their fields. This finding resonates with Ruecker & Shapiro's (2020) view that students might view learning academic writing from a pragmatic stance which involves mastering dominant writing practices.

Another strategy to show compliance was the employment of stance and engagement markers (Hyland, 2005, 2012). The study results show that student participants strategically and pragmatically employed these markers in their assignments to project their discoursal and authorial selves. Their linguistic choices revealed their understanding of how to project academic knowledge. For instance, the use of stance markers such as self-mention, hedges, and boosters, was dominant in most of the assignments submitted to me. The utilization of these metadiscourse features helps students navigate their positions and project an appropriate academic persona (Hyland, 2005). Livia, for example, used hedges (e.g., could), in an effort to show academic responsibility and humility. This was manifested when she reported that through this marker, she presented her paradigmatic perspective as a qualitative researcher who holds a responsibility to acknowledge the limitations of their research. In the same vein, Stephanie attributed the use of hedges, such as "perhaps" and "would" to avoid making definitive claims, a dominant practice in her program.

Furthermore, the results reveal that the process of presenting the discoursal and authorial selves involved an exercise of agency. It could be argued, based on the tenets

[2] In this thesis, **compliance** refers to students' strategic alignment with dominant academic conventions to meet institutional expectations and achieve academic goals.

of Academic Literacies, that the process of reproducing the dominant discursive moves in writing normalizes ideological discourses and practices (Lillis & Scott, 2007). However, I believe that the student participants were exercising their agency by having a pragmatic understanding of the appropriate practices (Hyland, 2016) and adapting them to suit their preferences. That is, they were creating a third space (Bhabha, 1994) where they mimic academic conventions and negotiate their voices at the same time. For example, through the strategic employment of engagement markers, students demonstrated their understanding of how to invite their readers into their work and signal their authoritativeness. Livia's use of directives and questions functioned not simply as stylistic choices, but as attempts to create a dialogue with her audience and guide their understanding of her perspective. Similarly, Tara's strategic use of rhetorical questions reveals her understanding of how to stimulate interest and engage the reader.

Another strategy that shows agency is the student participants' repurposing of Hyland's (2005, 2012) metadiscourse features to suit their preferences as academic writers. The results highlight the complexities of these features and how they can be utilized in creative and subversive ways. For instance, Nadia used questions as prompts for her *own* research, rather than directly to engage the reader, while Tara utilized the booster "highly" as an engagement marker to invite the reader to think about her research. Shirin ended her assignment with a question to test her reader's reaction whereas Stephanie used hedges to create a safe space for her and to mitigate potential criticism. These examples suggest a blurring of the boundaries between stance and engagement markers. They also indicate that the function of these features is not always fixed and can depend on the author's intentions and goals when navigating their discoursal and authorial selves.

Nonetheless, the results show that conforming to the perceived academic writing norms involves suppression of aspects of student-participants' voice, values, and beliefs. The primary reason for that suppression was students' perceptions of the ideal academic voice which was shaped by the power dynamics inherent in the academic context (Fairclough, 2003). For example, Stephanie described academic English writing as "cold" and "structural," and that pushed her to suppress her more expressive style in Spanish though her current program allows her to explicitly projects her voice. In the same vein, Livia sometimes suppresses her own beliefs and values to avoid "negative repercussions" and receive good grades (personal communication, May 10th 2024)

whereas Tara obscures her Armenian voice and adopts a neutral one when researching topics irrelevant to her cultural background. However, I believe that such choices reflect a deliberate negotiation between their personal voices and the pragmatic construction of their discoursal and authorial selves. That is, they make pragmatic choices that align with their goals while also considering their available possibilities of selfhood (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010; Ivanič, 1998).

7.2.3. Constructing Perceived Writer and Future Writer Selves through Feedback

As theorized by Burgess and Ivanič (2010), the perceived writer, which is constructed in the microgenetic time, represents the image of the author constructed by the reader based on the text while the future writer, introduced in this study, refers to the writer's aspirational academic self. The findings suggest that student participants often prioritize understanding the existing academic writing norms over challenging them to build those selves. By seeking feedback from instructors and other sources the students showcase a need to present themselves as credible and competent members of the academic community.

According to the Academic Literacies perspective, feedback from instructors is seen as a tool to demystify the academic expectations in order to contest them (Lillis, 2001; Street & Lea, 2006, 1998; Sutton, 2012). The results show that student participants seek feedback to align their writing practices with their desired image. They favour detailed dialogic feedback from instructors (Sutton, 2009; Nicol, 2014; Price et al., 2011; Tuck 2012; Winstone & Carless, 2019) not to create spaces for critiquing those practices but to understand the unwritten rules of the game (Lillis, 2001) and how they could become more fluent in them (Lillis, 2001). For instance, Lisa, who views challenging the dominant norms as a career suicide, favoured feedback in the form of a discussion to understand the specific expectations to avoid mistakes in the future and not to be misunderstood by the reader. Stephanie, who terms the writing conventions as "a little boy" watching her, preferred that type of feedback as it helped her understand the epistemological differences in argumentation between Spanish and English. However, only Sarah, who prefers iterative feedback, expressed her willingness to challenge those norms as she is encouraged to employ creative modes of meaning-

making. That is, her future and perceived writer selves could be built based on her ability to employ her preferred meaning-making practices

Therefore, based on the findings of this research I believe that the international multilingual graduate student participants' willingness to challenge or conform to existing academic conventions is not solely determined by their current understanding of those practices to build a perceived writer self but also by their aspirations for their future writer selves within the academic community. As such, students who prioritize securing a stable career or gaining recognition in their fields may be less inclined to challenge those conventions (Flowerdew, 2007; Wingate, 2012) because their future writer self is heavily reliant on complying with the status quo. It is also because many graduate students' academic future career is highly determined by their ability to publish in prestigious journals which publish in English (Hyland, 2016). So, my study contributes to the existing literature on academic writer identity by suggesting that building both a strong perceived writer self, which is well versed in academic norms, and a successful and acknowledged future writer self might be a paramount goal for students.

This finding aligns with the current understanding of the contextuality of critiquing dominant writing practices, (Harwood and Hadly,2004; Lillis & Tuck,2016). In other words, the negotiation of these aspects of the self is what Thesen (2014) calls the "tilting point" where students weigh the need to adhere to conventions with their own desires for self-expression. This also aligns with Benesch's (2001a, 2001b) view that a critical pragmatic approach should be sensitive to the contextual factors recognizing that students may strategically comply to be part of the academic community before they consider challenging its norms. Therefore, while the Academic Literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006) advocates for challenging dominant practices, my study suggests that this approach should be seen as a flexible approach rather than a rigid one. In other words, the application of Academic Literacies should take into consideration students' ambitions and future aspirations to determine whether or not challenging academic writing conventions is feasible.

7.3. Perceptions of Academic Writing: Convergence and Divergence

The third research question concerns the exploration of students' and instructors' perceptions of academic writing and to what extent these perceptions (mis)align with each other. The aim of addressing this question is to foreground instructors' views as gatekeepers of academic discourse (Street & Lea, 1998), which constitutes what Lillis (2001) terms an "institutional practice of mystery" (p.14). The analysis revealed a spectrum of agreement and divergence in student and instructor participants' views, particularly concerning the role of voice and the nature and function of feedback. As shown by researchers, these areas are central to understanding how students develop their academic writing identities and how institutions can better support them (e.g. Aiken, 2021; Bastalich et al., 2014; Hyland, 2012, 2018b; Ivanič & Camps, 2001; Lea, 2004; Lehman, 2020; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Sutton, 2012; Street & Lea, 1998, 2006; Tuck, 2012; Williams, 2019)

7.3.1. Perceptions of Voice

The concept of "voice" presented one of the areas of (mis)alignment. Researchers view voice from both individualistic and socio-cultural perspectives (Sperling & Appleman, 2011; Matsuda, 2015). It is not only about linguistic and rhetorical choices but also about the social and cultural dimensions of written texts (Matsuda, 2015). Instructor participants, as evidenced by Ashley's and Lauren's emphasis on the first-person pronoun as well as Jessica's encouragement of personal reflection, viewed the development of a strong, individual voice as a crucial component of academic writing and that a successful academic writer is one who could "insert themselves into the scholarship" (Megan, personal communication, May 21st, 2024). This reflects a dominant socio-cultural discourse in the instructors' respective discipline, Education. The instructor participants agreed that the main challenge for international multilingual graduate students is presenting that voice, and that view resonated with the experiences of the student participants in this study. So, the results of this study align with the theoretical frameworks that emphasize writing as a site of identity construction and is a fundamental tenet of academic literacies (Burgess and Ivanič, 2010; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006).

However, student participants did not fully align with instructors' interpretation of voice presenting. It is true that most student assignments submitted to me included the employment of the first-person pronoun "I" to project voice, but the results reveal that the student participants' understanding of building it is more nuanced. To construct it, students presented a pragmatic perspective, often prioritizing conformity to perceived academic norms over challenging them. They perceived the need to follow the rules of the "game" (Lisa, personal communication, May 12th, 2024) to succeed in their studies and build an ideal academic voice that might contradict their own personal voice. This personal voice represents their values and beliefs that might find no space within the dominant discourses, as was demonstrated by the experiences of Lisa and Stephanie.

This highlights the ongoing tension between the desire for originality and the need to conform, which is described as a "tilting point" between centripetal and centrifugal forces (Aiken, 2021; Thesen, 2014). Moreover, students may hold a different understanding of how to project their voices in their assignments. Tara, for example, explained that her voice could be explicitly projected in her assignments through her ability to situate her topic in the literature, rather than through employing the first-person pronoun "I." Nadia, on the other hand, believes the projection of her voice is achieved through "go[ing] native" (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 37) in her writing.

Furthermore, reflective writing emerged as a means for students to explore their own values and perspectives and form their critical voices (Williams, 2019). While instructors, such as Jessica and Lauren, designed assignments that foregrounded personal reflection as a core element, some student participants used reflective writing to integrate their identity and navigate the demands of the academic discourse, though sometimes in ways that did not fully align with instructors' expectations. For example, Shirin used reflective assignments to draw upon her cultural background and personal anecdotes to support her arguments and to establish a strong authorial presence. However, she also integrated scholarly references, which were not required by her instructor, as the only way she knew to defend her arguments. Similarly, Nadia mentioned that she would use references in her assignment if she had to submit it again to make it academic. This result might suggest that even if instructors believe that students' personal reflections are legitimate sources of knowledge, students might seek a solid ground where they can show that their personal insights and voices are valid through engaging with scholars of their fields (Hyland, 2012).

Another striking example of this misalignment is Lisa's view of her own reflective journal assignment. Although her reflective writing provided her with a space to reflect on her personal learning, engage with the course materials from a critical stance and format her reflective journal in a creative colourful way, she does not view her assignment as being fully academic. In other words, it does not give her the opportunity to position herself as an academic writer who conforms to the academic discourse conventions and disciplinary writing norms. This viewpoint underscores that students like Lisa may perceive academic identity as inherently linked to a specific set of genres and textual characteristics, often involving a detached, objective tone, rather than the more open and subjective modes of expression advocated by the Academic Literacies lens (Lillis, 2001; Lea, 2004; Lillis & Scott, 2007). This divergence of views may indicate potential epistemological differences concerning the sources of knowledge production (Lea, 2004). In other words, instructors may view personal experience and critical reflection as valid avenues to knowledge building, while students may prioritize established scholarly sources and conventional academic forms as the main criteria for producing legitimate academic work.

7.3.2. Perceptions of Feedback

The participants' perceptions on feedback, a crucial element in students' academic development (Baker (2017; Beaumont et al., 2011; French, 2018; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001; Nicol, 2014; Price et al., 2011; Sutton, 2012; Tuck 2012; Weaver, 2006; Winstone & Carless, 2019) revealed both agreement and divergence in its perceived function. Both instructors and students emphasized the importance of feedback in making expectations explicit and helping students develop their academic writing (Street & Lea, 1998). For example, student participants, such Lisa and Stephanie, preferred dialogic detailed feedback (Nicol, 2014; Price et al; Winstone & Carless, 2019) to negotiate those expectations while Sarah believes that this type of conversation mitigates power relations between the instructors and the students.

Instructors such as Megan, Lauren and Jessica valued the role of scaffolded feedback and viewed it as a method to make discursive writing practices explicit and provide opportunities for voice construction. This was demonstrated in their interviews as well as the assignment instructions they had submitted to me. This method reflects the instructors' awareness of the impact that feedback may have on students' confidence

and identities (Winstone & Carless, 2019). It also demonstrates their view on summative assessment as being ineffective in understanding the complexities of students' writing development (Beaumont et al., 2011; Baker, 2017; French, 2018). This type of feedback was also appreciated by student participants, such as Tara and Stephanie, who both believed that it helped them avoid misunderstandings with their instructors.

However, the results reveal one significant divergence which concerns the level and type of feedback deemed most helpful. Instructor participants, often aligning with a *formative* approach (as suggested by their emphasis on scaffolding and iterative feedback), prioritized "higher-order concerns," like argumentation and critical analysis, over "lower-order concerns," such as sentence-level features. This reflects a dominant pedagogical practice that gives priority to the macro-level concerns over the micro-level ones Turner (2019). However, in line with Lawrence and Zawacki (2019), Turner (2019) and Phillips (2017), I argue that focusing on both is important to construct students' writing identities and provide them with the resources to act as insiders, especially given that some student participants expressed a need to address issues related to both concerns. For example, Nadia expressed her need for feedback focusing on content, style, as well as surface features while Lisa and Stephanie struggled with coherence.

The lack of adequate feedback may explain why some student participants turned to external resources for feedback and writing support to address their micro-level concerns. For example, some student participants, such as Lisa, Shirin, Nadia and Sarah, reported that they resorted to AI language models to receive feedback on issues related to surface features such as sentence structure and vocabulary. This had the potential to increase the readability of their writing (Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024). However, while there was a sense of caution among some students about over-reliance on AI, as that may obscure their voices and limit their agency in constructing their identities, others did not see any negative impacts.

7.4. Key Contributions of the Study

The study offers an in-depth understanding of how seven international multilingual graduate students negotiate their identities withing the contested spaces of Canadian higher education. First, it adds to the existing knowledge that writing is not merely a transactional practice but also involves a complex and dynamic construction of

identity (Ivanič, 1998; Jenkins, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006). For that, students employ different strategies—such as mimicking scholarly work and seeking feedback—to build their writer identities. Second, adding *the future writer self* as an additional aspect in Burgess and Ivanič's (2010) writer identity framework, the study demonstrates that the students take a critical pragmatic stance (Benesch, 2001a, 2001b) towards dominant academic writing practices. This stance is influenced by their envisioned professional and scholarly aspirations. This also adds to the understanding that the concept of criticality in Academic Literacies (Street & Lea, 2006, 1998) is context-dependent and the idea of challenging academic norms should be critically examined and informed by students' pragmatic choices (Flowerdew, 2020; Wingate, 2012).

Third, the study underscores the importance of viewing feedback as a social practice rather than a one-way provision of information (Nicol, 2014; Price et al., 2011; Sutton, 2009, 2012; Tuck, 2012; Winstone & Carless, 2019). This view fills the possible gaps in the dominant monologic feedback that instructors may provide and demystify their expectations for the students to build their academic writer identities. This approach, combined with scaffolding, can address the micro- and macro-level concerns that are crucial for developing academic writing and writer identity (Lawrence & Zawacki 2019; Phillips, 2017; Turner, 2019). Lastly, study emphasizes the importance of integrating AI in academic writing. If adopted critically, it can empower multilingual graduate writers through providing them with key resources they may lack (Khalifa & Albadawy; 2024).

7.5. Pedagogical Implications

Based on the results of this study, I would like to suggest pedagogical practices that can be taken on both instructor and institutional levels to help international multilingual graduate students demystify academic writing norms and build their academic writer identities. First, on the instructor level, I argue that scaffolded dialogic feedback that is employed by instructor participants of this study is significant as this approach to feedback meets the three dimensions suggested by Sutton (2012): epistemological, ontological and practical. Epistemologically, it helps international multilingual graduate students understand the dominant meaning-making practices that might be different from those they encountered in their previous educational experiences. This was revealed in some student participants' autobiographical selves,

such as Shirin's and Nadia's, which were not resourceful enough to provide them with the appropriate knowledge production practices. Ontologically, learning those discursive practices helps students build their sense of being. That is, they can build their educational identities as insiders in the academic community.

Practically, this approach provides space to interpret and act upon feedback throughout the stages of scaffolding. However, I contend that scaffolded feedback should be coupled with French's (2018) conception, "Fail Better," or what I termed before as *safe failure*. In other words, as was reported by the instructor participants and demonstrated in their assignment instructions, scaffolded feedback should be provided in a low-stakes environment. This ensures creating a safe space for students to test new rhetorical choices and build their agency. For example, knowing that her instructor's priority is not deducting marks, Shirin took the risk of employing an engagement marker (Hyland, 2005, 2012) to exercise her agency while Lisa used colourful background for her assignment to present her creativity.

Second, on the institutional level, graduate writing support should be viewed from a different lens to address the needs of graduate students. The experience of the student participant, Nadia, may indicate the needed graduate writing support. Nadia sought institutional writing support in order to receive feedback relevant to micro-level concerns which were not addressed by her instructors. She attended writing retreats organized by her faculty, but those retreats were not meant to provide expert feedback. She was also denied continuing her enrollment in the undergraduate writing support course because of the institutional policy. This may indicate a prevalent institutional belief that graduate students are expected to have high-standard academic writing, which Nadia did not seem to possess. It also suggests a presumption that graduate students can be easily acculturated into the academic community (Lillis, 2003). So, in line with the results of Erling and Bartlett's (2008) and Cozart et al.'s (2016) studies, there was a lack of institutional space in which Nadia could learn the dominant writing conventions to build her writer identity.

This indicates a need for explicit writing support that should be an essential part of the multilingual graduate students' studies (Simpson, 2019). This was echoed by instructor participants such as Ashley and Lauren, and student participants such as Nadia and Stephanie. I strongly agree with this view because graduate students are

expected not only to comprehend knowledge, but also to produce new knowledge (Tardy, 2005). Therefore, to be effective, I contend that this support, be it writing centres (Lawrence & Zawacki, 2019; Lee, 2020; Phillips, 2017; Reardon et al., 2016), writing retreats (Murray & Newton, 2009; Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2021; Vincent et al., 2023) writing groups (Cui et al., 2022; Brooks et al., 2020; Pillips, 2012) or writing courses, their approach should be holistic. That is, they should provide effective and structured feedback and create opportunities to apply disciplinary knowledge (Lee, 2020).

This holistic writing support should account for feedback relevant to the micro- and the macro-level concerns (Lawrence and Zawacki, 2019; Turner, 2019). This can be achieved through engaging subject instructors and writing practitioners in that support (Clarence & Mcckenna, 2017; French, 2018; Jacobs, 2005; Olsson et al., 2021; Ticha et al., 2024; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). The subject instructors' job is to demystify disciplinary writing conventions (higher-order concerns) while the writing practitioners support students with sentence-level features (lower-level concerns). This collaborative work can be informed by a reconciliation between EAP and the Academic Literacies (Wingate and Tribble, 2012) to meet the contextual particularities of educational settings (Hyland, 2018a). Moreover, the study results show different perceptions from students on the call by proponents of Academic Literacies to challenge dominant writing conventions. Therefore, I find critical pragmatism (Benesch, 2001b; Benesch (2001a; Cherryholmes 1988; Pennycook, 1997) significant to inform this reconciliation in the sense that students' own aspirations and future selves should provide insights into the extent and locations to/at which questioning and challenging dominant writing conventions should be applied.

Lastly, the integration of AI tools in academic writing appears to be growing, with instructors and students having different stances. Some students did not view this integration as having negative impacts; others cautiously adopted it. At the same time, some instructor participants, such as Ashley and other researchers (e.g. Anson, 2024; Kasneci et al., 2023; Khalifa & Albadawy, 2024; Warschauer et al.,2023), expressed their concern that the uncritical use of AI might yield texts that are devoid of students' individual voices and own arguments. The study findings add to the need for critical digital literacy, as proposed by Warschauer et al. (2023), who stress the need to teach students to write *with* the AI tools. That is, students should be aware of the affordances and limitations of AI and make informed ethical decisions about its incorporation in their

writing practices. Moreover, instructors should explicitly guide students on how to craft prompts and critically evaluate AI feedback, which can be blended with the instructor discipline-specific feedback. In this study, the students who used AI effectively did so in conjunction with human feedback. I also suggest that this critical digital literacy should also involve instructors as the results of my research show that the instructor-participants were not fully aware of the limitations and affordances of AI and had different perceptions about its integration into academic writing.

7.6. Limitations of the Study

My study was limited by research focus and time. First, I collected data from a relatively small number of participants (seven students and four instructors) from the Faculty of Education at IWU. This may limit the generalizability of the findings to other academic disciplines where appropriate writing norms and disciplinary meaning-making practices may greatly vary. Accordingly, the negotiation of multilingual graduate students' disciplinary identities may also vary. Second, all participants, whether students or instructors, were female. While providing valuable insights into their experiences and perceptions, this homogenous recruitment in terms of gender may overlook the experiences and perspectives of male participants. Gender may play a role in the negotiation of students' academic writer identities and their perceptions of academic writing.

Third, I analyzed students' perceptions of academic writing and how they textually negotiated their identities in their written texts, but I did not seek instructors' perceptions of those same texts. Consequently, the study lacks a direct comparison between students' intentions and rhetorical choices on one hand and instructors' interpretations of their academic writing, on the other. Lastly, due to time constraints, I collected data at a single point in time. This did not allow me to track the changes in students' negotiation of their identities over time. The negotiation of academic writer identity is an ongoing process (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010), for which a longitudinal study may add valuable insights into the understanding of that process. Relevant to this, while the study acknowledged the significance of the growing role of AI writing tools, data from longitudinal research may provide a richer understanding of the impacts of those tools on students' agency and identity construction over time.

7.7. Recommendations for Future Research

Building on the limitations of this study, I will offer some directions for future research. First, future research should employ participants from diverse disciplines to capture a broader range of perspectives. This could be applied through employing a mixed-methods research design, which would give the researcher the chance to "determine if the qualitative themes…can be generalized to a larger sample" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 307). Second, a future study should ensure the inclusion of both male and female participants to investigate possible gender-related differences in the negotiation of academic writer identity among international multilingual graduate students.

Third, future research should include instructors in evaluating students' written texts. This would provide insights into how they perceive students' attempts to adhere to disciplinary conventions and, consequently, data would yield valuable pedagogical recommendations for instructors to demystify those conventions. In the same vein, future research should utilize ethnographic methods such as classroom observation and field notes to provide a more contextualized understanding of the day-to-day writing practices and feedback processes. This would allow researchers to observe actual interactions between instructors and students to understand the nuances of feedback exchanges and students' writing challenges.

By addressing the limitations and following the recommendations above, future research can build upon the findings of my research to better understand the experiences, challenges and writer identity negotiation of international multilingual graduate students. However, doing this research has made me realize that it is highly unlikely that any research can provide a complete understanding of academic writer identity dynamics. Furthermore, it seems improbable that research can offer fit-for-all pedagogical practices which address academic writing challenges that international multilingual graduate students face.

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Appendix A.

Interview Questions for Student Participants

Background

- Could you tell me about your background, languages you speak, when you came to Canada, work, and anything else you would like to share?

Academic writing

- Could you tell me about your experience in writing academic English ?
- How would you describe your expeirence in academic writing in your first language and in English ?
- Do you think it is harder to write in English than your first language ? Why ?
- How different is English academic writing required from the one you are familiar with?
- How have your past writing experiences influenced your writing for your program? Did they have negative or positive influence?
- Consider your voice and identity, how would you describe your academic writing in English ? Do you feel you are a member of the academic community while writing in English ?
- What challenges do you face when writing in English ? How do you overcome those challenges ?
- Do you follow the academic writing norms while writing ? How ?
- Do you challenge those norms ? Why/Why not ?
- Do you think it will be easier to write if those norms are not strictly followed ? Why/Why not ?
- Did you receive any training in academic writing ?
-

Academic written assignments and course descriptions

- To what extent do you follow assignment rubrics ?
- Do you usually negotiate the course descriptions and assignment rubrics with your instructors ?

- How do you project your writing identity in your assignments ? How do you defend your arguments ?
- What strategies do you use to communicate your ideas and beliefs in your assignments ?
- Do you think the rubrics and your instructors' expectations affected your writing ? If yes, how ?
- Do you think that the feedback you receive from your instructors is helpful ? Why/Why not ?

Closing

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Instructor Participants

Background

- Could you tell me about your background, work, teaching experience and anything else you would like to share?

Academic Writing

- How do your research interests and career influence your understanding of writing?
- What do you mainly look for when marking written assignments and giving feedback?
- What are the main issues faced by students while writing academic asignments?
- How do you respond to pieces of writing that are not relevant to your expectations in terms of academic style and genre?
- To what extent do you follow institutional and department marking guidelines?
- How do you deal with plagiarism?
- What plagiarism practices do you come across in your work?
- What do you consider to be the criteria for successful writing?
- Do you negotiate your writing rubrics and criteria with students?
- How do you respond to written asignments that challenge and do not follow the academic conventions ? Why ? To what extent do you accept any deviation from those conventions ?

Comments on students' writing

- What impressions do you have of the writers in your classes ?
- What textual features and writing strategies charaterize your students' writing?
- How do the writers in your class articulate their authority and stance ? Which textual features do they employ for this purpose ? What textual features do you encourage/discourage ?
- How do they convey their beliefs and ideas in their writing?

- What strategies do you use when providing feedback to students' texts ?

Closing

- Is there anything else you would like to add?