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Literacy and Disciplinary Experiences of Taiwanese/Chinese Students Learning to Write in a US Graduate TESOL Program

This article reports on a qualitative case study that explored the literacy and disciplinary experiences of 4 Taiwanese/Chinese students learning to write in a US graduate TESOL program. A combination of writing research methods was employed—case study techniques of interview and document collection, combined with discourse and text analysis of students' written language—within Bakhtinian perspectives on discourse socialization (Bakhtin, 1981; Gee, 1989/2001, 1992). The findings suggest the complex interplay between students' previous educational experiences outside the US and their current literate processes as they engage in reading-to-write, perceiving of self, and exerting strategies that show their individuality as well as group membership when interpreting and accomplishing field-related texts. Implications for theory, research, and practice are also discussed.

Being somewhat an "old-timer" English learner and teacher from Taiwan, studying in the field of second language education at the graduate level in the US academy, and hearing various anecdotes about colleagues and fellow students learning to write academically, I have come to understand that writing an academic paper is not an easy task for either native or nonnative English-speaking students, even in their field of study. The practice of graduate writing can mean a struggle not only with the act of writing itself, but also with other relevant literate and socialization activities: thinking and doing, communication and collaboration, and the expected conventions and conversations of a chosen field. These multiple and interrelated challenges have been addressed by established scholars, both native and nonnative researchers, who themselves learned to write as graduate students in their own discipline/field (e.g., Ackerman, 1995; Casanave, 2002; Silva et al., 2003).

Recent studies following a dynamic view of academic learning and discourse socialization have called for more research examining this process in depth. Ivanič (1998), for one, suggests that in order to understand writing as a site of struggle in which writers are negotiating their participation and membership in a given discourse community, it is important to examine students' personal life histories and experiences in relation to their current interactions with their social environments. Dantas-Whitney (2003) and Morita (2002) suggest the need for more research examining second language (L2) academic socialization in depth, oral and/or written, within specific cultural/language and disciplinary groups. This study, therefore, took a qualitative case study approach and examined issues pertaining to writing, academic discourse, and disciplinary enculturation as they manifest themselves in the experiences of four Taiwanese/Chinese students who participated in American academic discourse through academic writing practices in an MA program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

Background to the Study

This study took a qualitative case study approach and examined issues pertaining to writing, academic discourse, and disciplinary enculturation as they manifest themselves in the experiences of four Mandarin-speaking students who participated in American academic discourse through academic writing practices in an MA program in TESOL. It adopts Gee's concept of *Discourse* and Bakhtin's of *authoritative discourses* and *internally persuasive discourses* as its theoretical framework. In order to understand how the case study students formed their attitudes and values about writing, the study examined how they developed their particular ways of viewing writing in the various D/d discourses (Gee, 1989/2001, 1992) to which they had been previously socialized.

Following a Bakhtinian perspective, Gee (1989/2001, 1992), in discussing his concept of "Capital D" Discourse, asserts that in order to claim membership in a particular cultural group or field, one must say or write the "right" thing in the "right" way while playing the "right" social role and holding the "right" values, beliefs, and attitudes. Relatedly, Bakhtin's (1981) notion of authoritative discourse refers to language that is acknowledged by an authority, such as ways of speaking, writing, and being as members in a field of study or in society at large. An internally persuasive discourse, on the other hand, suggests a language coming from within one's consciousness or through others' words that individuals encounter in their daily lives.

These ideas are supported by scholars holding a sociocultural/

political view of writing, which focuses on writing assignments as instantiations of academic socialization processes with an aim of exploring the related issues of power, identity, and learner agency (e.g., Bartholomae, 1985/2001; Bizzell, 1986; Delpit, 1988; Rose, 1983/2006; Sperling & Freedman, 2001). This approach is also taken by scholars in the field of disciplinary socialization who suggest that enculturation processes at an advanced level must be understood in terms of the contexts in which they occur, and that learning to write is not simply a matter of acquiring pregiven sets of skills and knowledge, but also a complex process of negotiating identities, discourses, and power relations (e.g., Buell, 2004; Casanave, 2002; Ivanič, 1998; Morita, 2002; Prior, 1998). In keeping with these ideas, this study focused on the way academic writing instantiates disciplinary enculturation processes as language/literacy learning and professional development in a local TESOL discourse community.

Based on these theoretical assumptions, for this study I ask, in the context of writing in English within a US graduate program:

1. What kinds of writing perspectives do the students reveal as they speak of past literacy experiences, and how are these related to their current practices in their new graduate program?
2. What does the students' academic writing, along with their own and the instructors' accounts, reveal about their struggles and strategies in terms of becoming a member of their chosen field?

The study extends and sits among a number of studies that have investigated academic writing in relation to disciplinary enculturation and L2 discourse socialization from an interpretive perspective using a qualitative case study approach (e.g., Casanave, 1995, 2002; Connor & Kramer, 1995; Prior, 1991, 1995, 1998; Schneider & Fujishima, 1995). Studies following this line of inquiry have examined varied literacy or socialization activities alongside the production of academic texts at the graduate level. Connor and Kramer (1995), for example, have investigated the challenges that L1 and L2 graduate students face when they write in response to relatively long readings in the discipline of business management. Casanave (1995, 2002) and Prior (1991, 1995, 1998) have looked at the complex interplay between L1 and L2 students' texts and literate processes involved in and beyond their academic work in various disciplines of social sciences. Schneider and Fujishima (1995) have focused their study on one MA student from Taiwan in the International Public Administration program and

argued that, in addition to language-related issues, a familiarity with "accepted patterns of interaction" (p. 3) is essential to international students' or nonnative speakers' academic enculturation.

While these studies have offered great insights on varied issues related to nonnative graduate students' learning to write in a US academy, to my knowledge there has been no study focused on Taiwanese or Chinese students' literacy and disciplinary socialization experiences in the field of TESOL, an area that comprises a large segment of East Asian populations learning to teach English as a second or foreign language (TESOL, 2005). Therefore, in my study, I examine issues that are vital to writing and academic discourse socialization processes of students from Taiwan and China studying in an MA TESOL program.

Methods

This study incorporated a blend of research methodologies. It combined the research techniques of a qualitative case study, discourse analysis, text analysis, and ethnography (the latter, for example, in text-based interviewing and self-narrative participant accounts).

Context and Participants

The participants were four graduate students from Taiwan or China studying within the field of TESOL at a major US public university, Western American University (WAU), in the Bay Area of Northern California.[1] Except for Grace, who was born in China, the students were born in Taiwan. The students were all born and educated in Taiwan/China and were studying/studied at a graduate level outside Taiwan/China for the first time. All considered their native language to be Mandarin. While Sharon was a new graduate from the MA TESOL program at WAU, Susana, Thomas, and Grace were currently enrolled in the same program but were all at different stages of their program. All students were newcomers with fewer than five years each in the US and spoke English as their second language. All the students were single and in their 20s during the time I interviewed them. Table 1 provides an overview of the four students.

Data Collection

Student interviews. I interviewed each student three times, once each at the beginning, middle, and end of the data-collection period (defined as one semester, approximately 16 weeks). Each interview lasted from 40 minutes to two hours. I asked the focal students about what it means to be a student in the process of academic writing in the academic contexts of both Taiwan and the US, including how they understand the differences and struggles inherent in the differences.

Table 1
Overview of Focal Participants

Student	Age	Sex	Program of study	Degrees	First language	# of years in US	Formal education in Mandarin-medium school	Formal education in English-medium school
Sharon	26	F	A new MA TESOL graduate	BA English MA TESOL	Mandarin	3 yrs	K-college	None
Susana	27	F	TESOL 3rd yr	BA Business Administration	Mandarin	3 yrs	K-college	None
Thomas	24	M	TESOL 1st yr, 2nd semester	BA Linguistics	Mandarin	5 yrs	K-high school	College
Grace	22	F	TESOL 1st yr, 1st semester	BA English	Mandarin	1 mo	K-college	None

Student self-narratives. The focal students provided three written narratives about their academic writing experiences inside and/or outside of the classroom, one each at the beginning, middle, and end of the data-collection period. Unlike interviews, which by their nature unfold "on the spot," the self-narratives provided an opportunity for students to mull over and shape their thoughts and feelings (Bruner, 1991; Sperling, 1994). I suggested prompts such as "tell me the story of how you wrote your current assignment"; or "tell me how you came up with topics or ideas for this paper"; "tell me the story of how you accessed resources when you wrote papers for the class"; and "tell me your story of struggles and strategies in the process of writing this paper in English." All of the students received the same prompts at the beginning of the research term.

Student writing. The focal students agreed to provide as many written assignments as they wanted in a variety of courses they took over the semester(s) during their time of study in the TESOL program. In addition, the students mentioned that they lost or gave away some of their papers so that they could not give particular papers to me even if they wanted to. This experience with collecting data echoes what Prior (2004) expressed regarding a key dilemma in collecting and keeping track of texts: "In many cases, it is not possible to collect every text produced … some are thrown out or get lost … electronic texts may be deleted" (p. 172).

Instructor interviews and the instructor-generated texts. Four of the focal students' course instructors were each interviewed on one occasion toward the end of my data-collection period, and each interview lasted from 30 minutes to one and a half hours. Gaining the instructors' perspectives (both oral and written) was important as they served as important textual and nontextual elements in understanding students' appropriation of conventions and expectations embedded in a written discourse community.

Analysis

Data analysis was tied to the particular data. Analysis of the interview and the self-narrative data followed a *content analysis* approach (Huckin, 2004), while the students' course writing followed a *textual and intertextual analysis* approach (Bazerman, 2004; Buell, 2004). Both analytic methods involved sorting, coding, relating coded data to recurring themes, and interpreting the findings through the theoretical lenses that I applied for the study.

Analyzing student interviews and student self-narratives. To create coding categories for these data, I first read the interview transcripts and written narratives repeatedly and identified relevant topics (e.g., *writing as an academic* versus *personal practice*) to focus on. Coding for the categories along with examples from the interviews involved identifying topics and then coding relevant chunks as the units of analysis. Whenever appropriate, the units were double-coded as each chunk could not only be understood on its own, but also related to each other, and they provided context for each other (Eubanks, 2004).

Analyzing student writing. I categorized switches of writing codes to examine how such writing features index varied aspects of identities (Buell, 2004). Specifically, I began with an observation of the layout of the entire writing, and then I moved to an examination of syntactic and lexical features, including *rhetorical structure* (e.g., the shifts of first person pronoun "I" to an academic register such as "for the purpose of this paper"), and *cultural structure* (e.g., the shifts of English to another language). I noted each such occurrence in the text and then created an analytic category called *shifts in cultural and rhetorical structures* for these data. In addition to my own readings of students' texts, I also asked one of my former classmates, a native English-speaking professor, to read their paragraphs and point out the parts that were not native sounding. I also looked for *intertextual representations* through identifying traces of other texts and contexts, including direct and indirect quotation; mentioning of a well-known person or place; relying on common beliefs or familiar discussions; using recognizable terminology in the student's field; as well as the

instructor's written comments on the students' paper. I noted each reference in the text and then created another analytic category called *shifts in intertextual representation* for these data.

Findings

The study uncovered two major themes in relation to the two research questions that I asked, which played out as I discuss below.

1. Writing Perspectives and Practices of Newcomer Students in a Graduate Program

Students brought with them, as newcomers in their MA TESOL program, three kinds of writing perspectives: writing as social, pragmatic, and utilitarian.

Graduate writing as a social practice. While Sharon had more enthusiasm for and insights about her outside writing practices, Susana, Thomas, and Grace did not think quite the same way even though they brought with them a repertoire of writing performances through writing in diverse forms and in a variety of settings. In previous literacy experiences, in addition to the assignments that they wrote in academic settings, the students wrote diaries, short stories/poems, blog posts, emails, projector slides, and MSN or Facebook messages. But they associated writing more with passing exams.

Sharon, for example, recalled with enthusiasm that she kept her own Chinese diary (with traditional pen and paper) of daily events as young as she could remember: "I started to keep a diary when I was younger, and I'd write almost everything happens in my life." As Sharon grew into her adulthood, she started to keep a Chinese blog of an online journal, and according to her, "I wrote everything happens in life—including my own emotions and feelings." She appeared passionate about journal writing: "I write so I exist," and "writing is always for my own self-improvement." Sharon wrote daily in journals to express ideas and document experiences in her daily contacts with the world surrounding her.

As she entered the MA TESOL program at WAU, in spite of the challenges that she faced in the whole writing process, Sharon considered herself to be a relevant member who fit naturally in this academic community:

> Among all the TESOL classes, I liked Course A .. since the topics were so interesting and relevant to my own experiences, and it represents myself culturally .. I had a lot of insights to contribute to the class. … I enjoyed the whole writing process … even though sometimes I felt writing is such a tough task, but I always

think that every paper is a practice, and I truly learned from writing it .. and not just about finishing an assignment like I always did in Taiwan before. (Sharon, Interview)

As seen from the above, Sharon contrasted her attitudes and values of learning and academic writing between the US and Taiwan. Because the mainstream education of Taiwan fostered an attitude toward English learning and writing as isolated from real experience, Sharon perceived that she had been merely fulfilling assignments. She recalled:

Back then when I learned English in Taiwan, my teachers required that we learn by repetition, such as memorizing the grammar rules and practicing drills. … We were not encouraged to ask questions, nor were we provided opportunities to practice English in the context. … The kind of English that we learned is all in the books, so I don't think that I really learned. (Sharon, Interview)

As seen from the excerpts above, regardless of her previous work-oriented attitudes to English learning in Taiwan, having practiced outside writing as a way to participate in a new environment surrounding her, Sharon reconsidered and understood academic writing in TESOL as a practice where learning occurred through interacting with contexts and the people who participate in them. Through coming into contact with others from diverse backgrounds, such as contributing insights to the class, Sharon seemed to understand graduate writing as a social activity in which participation takes place through sharing with others.

These findings appear to contrast with those in Prior's (1998) study, in which he found that an international MA student, Mai from Taiwan, participated more in the role of a solitary worker, without collaborating with others or engaging in ideas, even though she was still treated as a legitimate member of the group. Similarly, the present study differs from Schneider and Fujishima's (1995) study, in which they found that an MA student in International Policy Studies, Zhang from Taiwan, participated solely as a "dogged worker" (p. 19) who seemed to aim his effort primarily at language-related issues on the textual level without seeming to be aware of the personal and social aspects of graduate learning that might affect his overall writing process and learning.

Graduate writing as a pragmatic practice. The students were all investing in different ways as they decided to pursue their MA degrees in TESOL, including learning English as a second language, master-

ing English teaching skills, or simply obtaining an advanced (foreign) degree from a US university.

In my interpretation, some students strongly believed that to obtain an "advanced foreign degree" would lead them to the ultimate acquisition of what Bourdieu (1986) calls *symbolic capital*, including money, power, and status, as there is a very demanding market for English teachers outside of the US. At the same time, the students were also investing in their own social identity as a "valued English instructor" outside the US, as this in turn would grant them access to a wider range of symbolic and material resources that they could not obtain otherwise. For example, Susana said that she observed that students in Taiwan highly value education, while those in the US do not seem to do so as highly, and that English teachers/instructors in the US deserve much better pay as well as better titles as in Taiwan. This view is consistent with Fwu and Wang's (2002) observation that teachers enjoy fairly high prestige in Taiwanese society.

However, this is not the only kind of investment that the students recognized. Sharon, for instance, believed that pursuing an advanced degree in TESOL would lead her to acquire specialized knowledge about English teaching and she hoped it would guide her to master her teaching skills—"I wanted to be equipped with some real-deal and hands-on knowledge. … I wish there is a class where they show you 'real things' that happen in classroom. …" (Sharon, Interview). Grace talked about learning to speak/write in English as a practical end for better language skills: "I want to improve my English for communication or business' purposes, but not for academics" (Grace, Interview).

These perspectives suggest that writing at an advanced level can be seen as an investment that individuals choose because it ultimately grants them access to certain goods that identify them as graduate students (e.g., passing grades and obtaining advanced degrees) or field professionals (e.g., becoming an English teacher and member of a scholarly community) (Casanave, 2002; Gee, 1989/2001, 1992; Peirce, 1995).

Graduate writing as a utilitarian practice. In addition to viewing their graduate writing practices as pragmatic, Susana, Thomas, and Grace were also revealed to be unwilling writers who constantly spoke with mixed feelings and hesitant attitudes about writing, such as keeping a blog but not intending it to be serious, trying to write but always giving up on it, admiring good writers but never wanting to become one. These paradoxical attitudes that the students revealed seemed to represent a range of internally persuasive discourses characterized by utilitarian values of what personal writing and academic writing meant to them, derived largely from their former school settings in

Taiwan/China. For example, Grace considered writing primarily as an imposed duty in Chinese academic settings:

> [Back in China,] I write only when I have to write .. like when I have to prepare for the tests or write for the class. But I don't think I'm a lousy writer .. maybe I should write more, but I don't like it. (Grace, Interview)

Thomas, too, saw writing as some kind of work that "needs to be done" in the US academic context:

> [Here in TESOL,] I don't write papers as my own personal interest, it's just something needs to be done. I don't even care about reading the instructor's feedback or reading through my whole paper again. I think no student would study that hard and keep rewriting and revising .. I don't think there's such person exists, but that's just my own opinion. (Thomas, Interview)

Similar to Thomas, Susana appeared to be struggling to balance competing perspectives about English learning and writing, such as knowing she needed to find ways to improve her English, but always ending up with meeting deadlines and keeping up grades in the TESOL program:

> I know I should find some ways to improve my English because I realized that my English ability was much weaker than a lot of my classmates [in TESOL]. But I always ended up catching up on all kinds of deadlines and keeping up my grades. … Because I didn't have enough time, I can't but choose to put grades as my first priority. … After all, I really need to pass the exams and get the degree. (Susana, Interview)

When talking about her previous experiences in English learning and writing, Susana kept emphasizing the competition and the exhaustion that she had experienced under the entrance exam system in Taiwan: "I don't quite remember what I've read or write before since I felt I've been busy passing exams in my whole life" (Interview). Likely as a result of this experience, as she went to school and throughout college in Taiwan, Susana appeared to value grades that academic writing could bring. She stated, for example, "I write because I need to prepare for the exams" and "I won't spend too much time in one assignment if that paper doesn't count too much point" (Interview). In other words, like Thomas and Grace, Susana had been treating writ-

ing mainly as an instrumental means toward getting through school. While this finding extends those of a range of disciplinary studies that found that students' primary goal for their academic writing practices is to pass courses or to obtain good grades (see, e.g., Casanave, 2002; Lunsford, 2011; McCarthy, 1987; Schneider & Fujishima, 1995), this study adds that because the students had formerly been socialized into Taiwanese/Chinese societies where grades and degrees are highly valued, academic writing was then significantly considered to be a *means* rather than an endpoint for achieving academic success as they further pursued their advanced studies in the US.

2. Learning to Be Professional Through Writing in a New Field

In this section, I discuss what the students' writing, along with their own and their instructors' accounts, revealed about their struggles in terms of becoming professionals in TESOL.

Struggling with reading-to-write. Not one of the students, regardless of his or her academic experiences or English competence, had been prepared in previous literacy practices for extensive graduate-level reading in a professional field. Therefore, without hesitation, all students named academic reading as one of their top struggles in terms of learning to read-to-write. While not necessarily demonstrating an interest in reading, all students also agreed that reading was one critical step toward accomplishing a written assignment for their courses. Thomas, for example, stated that "it doesn't matter whether you like it or not, you just can't write until you start to read" (Interview). Grace, too, suggested that "it seems that they [the program] place such a heavy emphasis on reading, as if no writing could be done without reading in the first place" (Interview). In addition, Thomas also suggested that he simply did not like to read-to-write, and that he preferred to take tests, a learning method that is commonly practiced in the Taiwanese educational contexts:

> I don't like to write because I don't like to read these books. … Since you only need to read one book to take a test, but you'd need to read a whole lot books to write just one paper. (Thomas, Interview)

The students seemed to struggle between the discourse of *reading-to-write* (see, e.g., Belcher, 1995; Connor & Kramer, 1995; Grabe, 2003) that was embedded in the TESOL curriculum, and their own views and perceptions about what academic reading meant to them in terms of learning to write at the graduate level. On the one hand, the study of TESOL at WAU incorporated reading the scholarly written

works of others as one major authoritative component across its curriculum; on the other hand, students were expected to produce their *own* written texts based on what they read either in *or outside* class, and at the same time to meet potential readers' expectations or the instructor's assessment criteria.

In order to fulfill various written assignments for these courses, the students were challenged to take on a professional identity as a scholar in the field through situating their voices among the sea of others' words established in the content area of TESOL. The students' struggles reflect Bakhtin's (1981) view that language (writing) is always half ours and half someone else's in that the students' academic voices were simultaneously shaped by and developed through voices of scholarly others in the field, which seemed to inevitably evoke a potential conflict in terms of ways of presenting a topic and thus reflected a struggle both with power and identity.

For example, Thomas expressed that one of the most challenging tasks for him in writing a paper was to search for relevant ideas in the area to help him locate his own in relation to those of others:

> I think the most difficult part in writing this essay [in Course A] was to search for relevant information that others already did on the topic that I wanted to do. Like for this essay I wanted to talk about the history of English language teaching in Taiwan, but then I couldn't find specific literature that's relevant enough to this topic. So at the beginning I had to spend quite some time to just look for if anybody else has ever done on this topic before. Fortunately I did at the end … but then it's still hard to write … since how am I going to make their works work for me and then use my own words to express my work through their words? (Thomas, Self-narrative)

Course A is an introductory course in TESOL in which students were required to accomplish two essays on topics related to selected themes of their own choice. A close look at Thomas's essay sample, along with his own and the instructor's accounts about language use in his courses, reveals his struggle of taking on a professional identity as a student-writer. In the sample, I have included Dr. Avi's (Course A instructor) hand-written comments in boldface and brackets and cross-outs.[2] (Note that superscript numbers were added to the beginning of each sentence for reference in the analysis.)

History of English Language and English Language Policy
[**and ELT**] in Taiwan

[1]English is a global language, so people in Taiwan want to learn it. [2]Taiwanese government made English required foreign language in school[**s**] in 1968, and during these 40 years, the government [**has**] made [**several**] changes on the English language policy. [3]I write about the English policy in Taiwan and some history [**historical**] backgrounds about English [**language teaching?**] in Taiwan in this essay.

[4]English is an international language, and most people in the world want to learn it or use it in their daily life. [5]English shifts from foreign-language to second-language status for an increasing number of people (Graddol, 1997). [6]As a result, most countries see English as not only a foreign language, but also a second language. [7]Especially in some Asian countries where the English language is not used a lot in daily life, there will be more focus on learning English in order to communicate with other foreign countries in different areas[**.**] [**Besides,**] speaking good English becomes a metaphor for a successful life. [8]English is a medium of academic pursuit or an academic subject required for pursuing higher education, so various governments in East Asia, including Korea, Japan and Taiwan have recently increased English language education, and try to focus on the oral skills of English (Butler, 2005). [9]I am from Taiwan, and I know there have been some policy changes on English education recently, so I want to talk about it and try to see the differences between the old policies and the new policies [**ones**]. [10]People who read my paper will have more ideas on history of English in Taiwan before and after KMT [**language?**], the failure of old policy, and what the new English policy in Taiwan focus is after reading my paper.

A close look at the form, that is, sentence structures and word choices, of Thomas' introduction reveals his numerous unconventional uses of English, thus marking the text as second language writing and his identity as an L2 writer, as evident in the instructor's in-text comments. The introductory paragraphs also mark another identity, Thomas as a developing TESOLer, through certain language and language forms that represent the words and utterances of others in the field. For example, by using more explicitly recognizable kinds of indirect quotations of others in the field (specifically, by specifying a source in parenthesis and then paraphrasing the original in his own words), the way in which Thomas positions his statements (Sentences

1-4; 6-7) in respect to the statements of others (Sentences 5 and 8) becomes significant intertextually, indexing shifts of rhetorical codes of discourses and identities. The shift from personal statements to citing references in the field suggests a more academic register and formal tone, showing Thomas to be a relevant member in this academic field.

As with his other course taught by Dr. Avi, I found that Thomas also followed this pattern of organizing his papers. However, this particular way of organizing a text does not appear to be an effective one, not meeting the expectations that the instructor, Dr. Avi, established for the written assignments. For example, Dr. Avi's end comments on Thomas's papers included: "The essay is just a collection of information, not a coherent paper …" and "I expected a better treatment of the text you read … you should have summarized the literature well, and critiqued it which can of course include your experience, etc." It appears that although Thomas consciously knew that in order for him to write like a TESOLer, he needed to rely on its authoritative language and make it his own, in the end, he had yet to learn the reading-to-write skills expected by the instructor (i.e., demonstrating an understanding and interpretation of the field through summarizing and criticizing others' texts from a more coherent perspective rather than "collecting information").

Dr. Avi also recognized the students' struggle of reading-to-write and regarded this skill to be a typical challenge for a majority of students who are new to the field of TESOL:

> The main thing is reading problem, and beyond that .. and some students might be actually reading, but even in a particular genre .. but then not able to make a connection between what exactly is the knowledge base in a particular discipline .. and what (?has) a particular author or article that you are reading has contributed to that knowledge base. They seem to be missing the big picture in terms of what do we know .. what's the major issue that's been investigated in our field, what're the major questions that's being asked, and what do we know so far about this question .. what is it that we do not know, and what is open for further investigation .. and then when I read this particular author or article, where do I look at in that big picture in terms of the discipline, the knowledge base that we already have. I think many students lack that kind of ability in making connections between a particular piece of writing or the work of a particular author with the overall scholarship of the field .. and I think this is substantial particularly in the graduate level. (Dr. Avi, Interview)

The instructor's opinions supported those of the students in this study, who regarded reading-to-write a major obstacle that they had to conquer if they wanted to achieve academic success and be recognized as professionals in their chosen field. This point augments Casanave's (2002) observation that novice academic writers at the Japanese university that she studied wrestled with "merging the voices of published authorities with their own" (p. 66) when students were required to use a certain number of references to help support their arguments in their papers.

Struggling with defining self as a writer and researcher. The students were found to struggle in balancing their selves as professionals (who wrote as natural researchers) and their selves as students (who wrote "for credit" and who "followed the rules"). For example, while the students appreciated that, in the MA TESOL program at WAU, they were often given complete freedom to choose their topic of interest for research papers in the courses, at the same time, they were also challenged to take responsibility to think and write independently like a researcher, as expected by their course instructors:

> The most difficult part in Course A was that we have to come up with our own topic when it comes to writing an essay. Back in my undergrad and ESL studies, the instructor would just assign a topic for us to write. However, in Dr. Avi's class, we have to think and decide what we want to research about … another thing is, I wasn't really sure of what Dr. Avi wanted because there was never instructional guide for any of the papers. … I prefer that the instructor tell us exactly about the topic, the content, and pages so that I can better organize the paper. (Thomas, Self-narrative)

Since Thomas had never been provided with such an opportunity to explore a topic of his own, particularly in his learning experiences in Taiwan, he appeared to struggle with this way of learning, which seemed to require that students develop a sense of authority and agency that asked them to act as legitimate contributors to a professional community (for a compatible finding, see Casanave [2002]).

Sharon articulated a similar struggle in Course B, an advanced core course in culture and second language acquisition, which she took with Dr. Ashley near the end of the program:

> [In Course B] what I had been doing back and forth might be to decide my topic. Everyone had a meeting with Dr. Ashley before we started our project, we had to think what topic we want to do

and what was the answer we were looking for. I spent a lot of time on this process. … [T]his assignment required us to think deeper and deeper. Dr. Ashley didn't want something general but something specific and we better found something that no one else had an answer yet. That was the most difficult part for me … yet that seemed to be the basic requirement of a researcher. (Sharon, Self-narrative)

Below is a sample from a literature review paper that Sharon did for her final project in Course B. In the sample I have included the instructor's in-text comments in boldface and brackets and underlining. (Note that superscript numbers were added to the beginning of each sentence for reference in the analysis.)

[1]Politeness is one of the keys to decrease the possibility of conflict immersion [**maybe wrong word?**] because showing respect<u>s</u> to other people can maintain a friendly atmosphere. [2]For language learners who are in the target language (TL) environment or required to interact with target langu[**age**] speakers, the concept of politeness is important. [3]By acquiring <u>the concept</u>, [**most people already have concept of politeness. The problem is that it may not be the same as the concept of other language speakers**] interactions between TL speakers and language learners are expected to be smooth<u>ly</u> and with fewer conflicts. [4]<u>On the other hand</u> [**Furthermore**], feeling comfortable in TL environment might also help learners in language acquisition. [5]Although politeness seems to be a universal idea that everyone understand, it is still abstract for a language learner and requires instructions for clarification. [6]However, politeness seems to be rarely addressed explicit[**ly**] in class, but implicit[**ly**] and embedded under the cultural norms. [7]Therefore, I am interested [**in**] how politeness has been addressed in the courses and whether it is a factor for language acquisition or not. [8]Historical methods in teaching politeness and issues related to politeness in classroom will be examined in the following paragraphs.

In this introduction to a literature review (Sentences 1-6), Sharon offers multiple reasons for choosing to focus on the concept of "Politeness" and why this particular topic interests her as a researcher. Sentence 7 signals a thesis statement suggesting a researchable question rather than a stance, which Sharon, the researcher, wants to pursue on this particular topic. Sentence 8 further indicates the purpose of a literature review assignment, one that aims to explore relevant

information on a researchable topic. During our interviews, Sharon agreed that she saw herself both as a "writer" and a "researcher" in the paper's introduction because this section informs her readers of what and why she was writing this particular paper. However, she further explains that she felt strongly about herself being a learner:

> In this whole paper [literature review], I read a lot and I kept thinking in this process. This assignment is for myself to learn, but as a writer you have to write something for others .. but this is something for myself 'cause all of the assignments I have to get credit for myself. I believe that the instructor set up all these assignments for us to learn. (Sharon, Interview)

Similarly, as with the other papers that she did in Courses A and B, Sharon also expressed a sense of self in relation with writing data reports:

> I just wrote what I've seen [during research processes] in these data papers, and not much about myself because it's about what I've found and discovered from my data collection. … I just followed the rules since it's my first try, and I'm not sure if what I've done is able to be considered a valuable research .. so I felt I'm only a learner, and I'm not sure if it's valuable enough to be considered as a research paper in academia. (Sharon, Interview)

It seems that Sharon not only developed mixed feelings about what she felt about writing a particular assignment, but that she also established multiple and sometimes contradictory perceptions of self for different assignments—for example, seeing herself as a researcher in research-based papers but not perceiving herself as a valuable researcher; considering herself as a writer when composing a paper, but not regarding herself as a qualified writer who can "write something for others." In addition, while Sharon was reluctant to identify herself as a writer or a researcher, she emphasized that she would prefer to be recognized as a "learner" and a "teacher" (e.g., "I would be happier to be seen as a learner and a teacher, 'cause that's more of *me*" [Interview]).

As with Thomas's texts, Sharon's writing sample included the instructor's grammatical corrections, including word choices, morphological endings, articles, and prepositions, as illustrated in boldface and brackets in her writing sample. Although Dr. Ashley stated during our interview that she saw these as "pretty minor errors," and that she did not think of them as getting in the way of understanding Sharon's

writing, Sharon seemed to hold quite a different view from the instructor and regarded these grammatical errors/mistakes as one major obstacle that prevented her from becoming a good academic:

> Grammar, used to be the most confident part most international students have. However, when it comes to writing, not about principles anymore, I got frustration very often. Articles, prepositions and sentence structures in academic tone are really complicated. (Sharon, Self-narrative)

During our interviews, Sharon kept repeating to me that "I can't write," "I don't know which word to put into use," "I'll never write like them [my American classmates]," and "It'll never be enough for me [in terms of writing well]." Sharon perceived that her English training in Taiwan had been to follow a set of rules and that she rarely had had opportunities to write or speak English in actual contexts. Because of this experience, she found herself struggling to manipulate uses of English words, which seemed to be an important skill, and at the same time, she wrestled to reason out what makes good academic writing and writer.

Discussion

What, then, can we learn from these Taiwanese/Chinese students' experiences in this study? First, this study adds to an emerging picture of East Asian international students learning to participate in their new ESL/undergraduate/graduate settings, in which, even within one ethnic/language group (e.g., Japanese or Korean, or in this case Taiwanese/Chinese), differing perceptions/perspectives and struggles reflect the different experiences that students bring to their new learning and living contexts (see, e.g., Lee, 2006; Morita, 2002). The study also represents a valuable addition to a growing body of multicultural case studies of academic literacy research that uses an interpretive perspective to examine the interrelationship among texts, people, and disciplinary contexts in graduate-level education (e.g., Casanave, 1995, 2002; Prior, 1991, 1995, 1998).

While all students shared certain attributes in their biographies (e.g., being Mandarin speakers and having undergone entrance exam–oriented schooling in Taiwan/China), they held disparate and contradictory views toward what writing means to them (e.g., writing being social, pragmatic, or utilitarian). These differences, in turn, seemed to have helped influence, transfer to, or (re)shape the students' newly formed perspectives/perceptions and struggles/strategies with

their graduate writing practices in their new graduate program. For example, while Sharon regarded writing in TESOL as an activity in which she collaborated with diverse others, other students thought of it more as a utilitarian means of getting through graduate school. While the students recognized reading-to-write a major obstacle facing them, they revealed various ways of trying to become members of this new community, such as using recognizable field-related language and relating content-appropriate discussions in their written assignments. Taken all together, this study highlights the significance of understanding what the students bring with them to the academic contexts as individual language users and as group members, and how these experiences continue to shape and be shaped by their literacy and social practices in the varied cultural/social/academic communities they have been part of.

Additionally, although this study is limited in its scope to the cases of a small number of students in a graduate-level program, it helps us to reflect on the varied issues involved in multicultural students' learning to write in a new academic context. While this study focused on one language group in one field, future research can investigate different groups of learners to examine, as well as to compare and contrast, potential differences in students' writing perspectives and practices based on language, culture, gender, age, race/ethnicity, field of study, or stage in a professional field.

The findings from this study also have implications for our understanding of multicultural groups learning to write at an advanced level. It speaks to the usefulness of Bakhtinian perspectives (Bakhtin, 1981; Gee, 1989/2001) to examine academic literacy practices within the context of discourse socialization experiences of L2 students. According to Bakhtin, learning happens only when individuals interact with one another within a particular environment struggling with the multiple "voices"—in this study, the scholarly and authoritative written works of the field and the course instructors, as well as the students' L1 counterparts in the classroom.

In this study, the students were seen to make decisions about how much to identify with and negotiate "ways of writing in TESOL" and "ways of being TESOLers" that made meaningful their varied ways of participating academically and developing membership in the profession of TESOL. Bakhtin and Gee's related theories are valuable particularly in helping us to understand why and how struggles happen as individuals enter a new learning context and interact with the people who participate in it. As Freedman and Ball (2004) suggest, instead of understanding struggles as something problematic at the present mo-

ment, "Bakhtin's theory implies that it is essential to look beyond the moment of miscommunication to the longer-term, ongoing dialogic process if we want to understand the struggles that lead to learning" (p. 6).

Finally, this study contributes to a well-established subfield of research of foreign-educated students coming to study in a US academy at the graduate level. It shows the complex interplay between students' previous educational experiences outside the US and their current literate processes as they engage in reading-to-write, perceiving of self, and exerting strategies that show their individuality as well as group membership when interpreting and accomplishing field-related texts. These findings emphasized the importance of understanding individual learners as "complex cognitive, social, and emotional beings whose accounts not only tell us about themselves but also about social practices in which they participate(d) in the past, present, and future" (Morita, 2002, p. 208). In bridging theory, research, and practice, Bakhtin's concepts of authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse, and Gee's of "Capital D" Discourse, have helped to understand the kinds of value systems and performances that diverse students bring with them to learning, and how those experiences might lead to struggles in a new Discourse. As I have already discussed, this theoretical implication provides a useful lens/tool for researchers and educators and their students to analyze and to reflect on the multiple and sometimes competing perspectives/perceptions that students have when learning to write in an L2 and in a professional field.

Author

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Notes

[1]Pseudonyms are used for all the names of research locations and participants.

[2]The instructor's hand-written comments were re-created into typed format by the researcher.

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