Establishing an academic identity: Second language writers and the institution

Corinne Boz

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Abstract

This study takes an academic literacies approach to writing and draws on the principles of a Critical Applied Linguistic approach to language. It aims to examine international postgraduate students' experiences of academic writing in the UK, with particular reference to their experience of trying to establish an academic writer identity. Importance is placed upon the wider institutional context, and the way that decisions on an institutional level serve to undermine students' attempts to establish a credible academic writer identity. Towards this end, this discussion incorporates an observation of the way that the Pre-sessional English course does or does not prepare international postgraduate students for study in their chosen departments. Significantly, the case study structure of this study allows the voices of the students to be represented in the discussion of such issues and allows them to relate their experiences of learning to represent themselves in an academic writing context. Drawing on the rich data provided, the study focuses on the discussion of the way that negotiation of academic writer identity is affected by feedback and grading practices, issues of patchwriting and plagiarism, and the use of the first person pronoun. The study concludes by analyzing the implications of the data and suggesting ways in which the institution may take practical steps towards providing a more supportive environment for second language writers. This study makes a significant contribution to the field of academic literacies research.

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1 Introduction

As an experienced teacher of Academic English both in the UK and overseas, I have developed a keen interest in the way that students perform writing tasks in a second language. I am particularly interested in the challenges that students face in trying to establish a credible academic identity for themselves within their chosen field. To become accepted, established, and successful, students must prove themselves to be legitimate members of the particular academic Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991)[1] relating to their chosen field of study, by producing written documents that not only display their specialized subject knowledge but also conform to academic conventions. This challenge is compounded by the fact that, although students and teachers often assume that academic conventions are specific and standardized across the university, it is, in fact, not the case as these conventions are often discipline-specific. It is the grasping of these academic conventions that can make the transition from novice to accepted member of the community difficult, especially for those students for whom English is not their native language and who, more significantly, have not been trained in writing in the particular way that is valued by the university system in the UK.

It is my experience of working with many postgraduate students as they try to negotiate their positions within the academic community that inspired me to research in this area. Although there is plentiful research in the area of second language writing (see Kroll, 2003; Matsuda and Silva, 2005; Pecorari, 2003; Silva and Matsuda, 2001), I have discovered a lack of

[1] Communities of Practice have been defined as 'groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 7)

research based on the experiences of and expressed in the voices of the students themselves. I wanted to create a space for the focus and discussion of the research to directly reflect the specific experiences of the students. This study, therefore, begins with a theoretical examination of the context surrounding academic writing in a second language and the issues that may arise when students try to establish an identity in their academic writing. I then move on to examine a number of case studies designed to allow the students' voices to be a valuable part of the discussion of such issues.

1.1 Aims of the study

My intention in this study is to concentrate on the issue of identity in academic writing. I believe that this issue is central to the struggle that many international postgraduate students have in trying to integrate themselves into the academic community in their particular institutions in the UK. I also believe that, to date, there is a lack of specific case study research which attempts to deal with this issue. It is my intention to focus on a number of case studies in order to reveal particular experiences that will contribute towards changing practices on an institutional level, so that students can be better supported in their attempts to create academic identities that work for both themselves and the academic community that they are entering. To achieve this aim, I analyze the way that decisions on an institutional level affect students' representations of themselves at a textual level, as students struggle to establish their identity in academic writing in a second language. However, as the intention in this study is to allow the students' voices to be heard, the study has had to be flexible enough to deal with the issues that the students decided were important. The resulting study is intended to represent both my interest in exploring the ways that students attempted to establish their academic identities and to incorporate the students' agendas by discussing the issues that they felt were important. The specific aims of this study are, therefore,

- To analyse international postgraduate students' experiences of academic writing in the UK, with particular reference to their experience of trying to establish an academic identity, and relate these experiences to the wider institutional context
- To examine the ways in which decisions on an institutional level support or undermine international postgraduate students' attempts to establish a personal academic identity in their writing
- To observe the ways in which the Pre-sessional English course does or does not prepare international postgraduate students for study in their chosen departments, with particular reference to the way that this may affect the students attempts to establish their academic identities
- To give voice to the issues that international postgraduate students felt were important in relation to their experience of learning to represent themselves in an academic writing context at a UK Higher Education institution

Candlin and Hyland, in their introduction to *Writing: Texts, Processes and Practices* (1999) set out clearly the three dimensions underlying research on writing,

> The description and analysis of texts, the interpretation of the processes involved in writing, and the explorations of the connection between writing and the institutional practices which in large measure are constituted and sustained through writing (Candlin & Hyland, 1999, p.1).

This study covers these three dimensions underlying writing research. I analyse and interpret sections of written texts produced by students in an academic setting at various stages of their

courses [2]. Through discussion with the producers of the texts, I have shed some light on the processes involved in producing assessed work for these particular students and through discussion with both students and teachers, I help to illustrate how institutional practices have affected the production of this work on an individual level. Through discussion of the issues raised by this research, I highlight the ways in which changes in institutional practice on a macro-level may work to help international postgraduate students perform better as academic writers within the UK higher education system[3]. As Lea and Street emphasise

> Accounts of writing cannot be understood solely in terms of the immediate situations of texts but rather reflect, and in turn constitute, social and institutional practices derived from the broader context (1999, p.62).

It is crucial to explore the relationship between the students' experiences of writing and the context in which these experiences take place, as they have an important reciprocal relationship. It is my aim to reveal ways in which this relationship works with specific reference to the data from the case studies.

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[2] The interpretations from the data are my own and have not been verified with the students. The short and intensive nature of the pre-sessional course did not allow for discussion at a later date.

[3] Candlin and Hyland (1999, p.2) in their introduction to a collection of essays on research on writing, point out that the last twenty years has seen great interest in research into writing. The extensive and varied nature of this research is not without its problems, however. 'The drawback of this extensive and variously purposed literature is that its very diversity works against its cohesiveness, and thus blunts its explanatory potential. Work in different fields of writing research often shows little overlap, or even mutual recognition, and little engagement takes place between writers of different disciplinary or theoretical affiliations' (Candlin and Hyland, 1999, p.2).Although in this study I used a wide range of sources to support my research, it has to be acknowledged that my sources have predominantly been drawn from the particular field that interests me. This study, despite this limitation will make a valid contribution to the field of writing research and add to a growing body of research in the area of Academic Literacies.

1.2 Structure of the study

This study has been divided into two main sections in order to clearly present both the theoretical and methodological background to the study and to discuss the issues that have arisen from the data itself. As stated above, Part 2 provides a forum for the voices of the students to be revealed and analysed. The structure of the study, then, is as follows:
In section 1.3, I begin by placing myself inside the research frame. In other words, in order for my role as the researcher in this study to be clear and open for interpretation and discussion, it is essential for my position in the study to be obvious. I , therefore, establish my methodological and theoretical position and the approach I have taken to the study. I align myself with the progressive approach to qualitative research (Holliday, 2002). I establish my theoretical perspective with reference to the key influences on this study (Pennycook 2001, Lillis 2001, Ivanic 1997, Lea and Street 1999, Barton and Hamilton 1998, Gee 1996). I then discuss the role that I have taken in the research process and the way that my methodological and theoretical position necessarily affects the data that has been gathered and its consequent interpretation and representation.

In Chapter 2, 'Voice, Identity and the L2 Writer', I discuss the way that the key terms relevant to this study have been defined and establish my own interpretation of these definitions and the way that they will be employed throughout my study. In Section 2.1, I examine definitions of voice and identity and discuss the way in which, although many researchers have linked the teaching of voice to the promotion of a Western notion of individualism[4], the concept of voice, and in particular 'voices', is still a useful theoretical and pedagogical tool that may be used to aid students in creating or refining their academic identities. In Section 2.2, I examine perceptions of academic writing and in Section 2.3, I analyse the link between identity and

[4] See Ramanathan & Atkinson (1999) and Bowden (1999)

writing which is crucial to this study. In section 2.4, I go on to discuss the issues involved in establishing an academic identity.

In Chapter 3, 'English for Academic Purposes: Integrating the individual into the institution', I provide a brief definition of English for Academic Purposes and discuss criticisms of the field based on its perceived refusal to engage with its political nature (Pennycook 2001, Benesch 2001, Canagarajah 2002). In Section 3.3, I discuss critical approaches to EAP (Clark 1992, Canagarajah 2001, 2002, Starfield 2001, Benesch 2001). After this theoretical introduction, in Chapter 4, 'The Study', I provide a detailed description of the setting for the research or the institutional context from which the data was gathered. I discuss the participants and the research procedures before going on to present the data analysis.

In Part 2 of the study I present the main discussion of the issues that arose from the data. In Chapter 5, 'Don't you want to hear what I have to say': Academic writing and the expression of personal opinion', I use extracts from the data to analyse the ways in which students and lecturers dealt with the issue of using personal opinion in academic writing and have drawn on the work of Ivanic and Clark (1997), Street (1994) and Cotton (2004). In Section 5.1, 'Approaches to the use of 'I", I continue the theme of the personal and analyse the differing opinions and perspectives surrounding the use of the personal pronoun and the ways in which this affected the students' attempts at constructing an academic identity. In Chapter 6, ' Avoiding academic identity: Patchwriting and the invisible writer', I discuss issues of plagiarism and patchwriting and analyse the ways in which students hide their own writer identities behind the language of published source materials. This section draws particularly on the work of Pecorari (2003). Chapter 7, 'The role of teacher feedback in helping L2 students establish an academic identity', draws on the work of Lillis (2001) and Hughes (2004) to discuss the ways in

which students in this study were affected by teacher feedback and grading. Finally, in the conclusion, I summarise the major issues that have arisen from the case study data. I clarify the way in which the theoretical discussion and case study data have fulfilled the aims of the study and provided an original contribution towards the field of second language writing research. Most importantly, I clarify the implications of the study and outline institutional changes that may be beneficial to students on an individual level.

1.3 My position in the study

Firstly, I will place myself inside the research frame of this study and make my theoretical position clear. I believe this is essential for any critical work (see Pennycook 2001, Lillis 2001). In terms of the research methods that I have chosen for this study, it is important to set out clearly where I stand. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) point out that research that 'appears to have been carried out without reference to other qualitative research traditions and where the beliefs of researchers and their relationship to their research practice is never explicitly discussed' (p.19), leaves the research open to criticism. Some researchers may feel that this kind of 'generic qualitative research' (Morse, 1998 cited in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p.19), which does not make specific connection to tradition, makes it difficult to evaluate the quality of the research. In order to avoid such criticisms, I will establish my research position clearly.

In terms of a research paradigm, I place myself within a 'progressive' qualitative research framework (Holliday, 2002, p.19)[5]. A progressive approach to qualitative research stands in opposition to the more traditional naturalist approach[6] which sees reality as 'relatively

[5] Holliday employs the term progressivism to group together a number of different research paradigms including critcal, postmodern, feminist and constructivist paradigms which have in common an opposition to naturalism. According to Holliday all these paradigms share certain beliefs: 'i) reality and science are socially constructed, ii)researchers are part of research settings, iii) investigation must be in reflexive, self-critical, creative dialogue, iv)aims to problematise, reveal hidden realities, initiate discussions' (Holliday, 2002, p.18).
[6] Holliday's (2002) term. He explains that other writers may refer to naturalism as postpositivism or realism.

straightforward' and may be considered similar to a positivistic research paradigm which views reality as observable and verifiable by fact. The progressive approach to qualitative enquiry that informs this study does not see a situation or setting as an independent reality but as something that is constructed between the researcher, the subjects of research and the institutions that comprise the settings for the research. This approach allows for the role of the researcher to be considered as part of the research setting and acknowledges that the researcher will have some effect on what is being studied[7]. To carry out successful research in this way it is essential for the researcher to be reflexive and self-critical and to be fully aware of the role that they take in the construction and interpretation of the research data (Holliday, 2002, p.18). As Holliday states

> Thus, the written study also becomes an account of personal struggle to make sense of complex human situations within which the researcher herself often becomes implicated (Holliday, 2002, p.10).

It is crucial, then, to acknowledge my role as researcher and the way that my interaction with the participants and the data has contributed towards the construction of this study.

In addition to the research background to this study, it is necessary to examine the theoretical work that has informed my research. In writing this study I see myself as located within a Social Practices or Academic Literacies approach and taking a Critical Applied Linguistic stance towards my work[8].

According to Theresa Lillis (2001) a Social Practices approach emphasises

- Student writing as a social act

[7] See Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) and Gubrium and Holstein (1997)

[8] As described by Alistair Pennycook in *Critical Applied Linguistics: A critical introduction (2001).* See p.13 of this study for a fuller discussion.

- Language as constructing meanings/identities
- Literacies as numerous, varied and socially/institutionally situated
- The socio-historically situated nature of essayist literature
- The privileged status of essayist literacy within academia
- The contested nature of dominant academic conventions

(Lillis, 2001, p. 31)

I will discuss the Social Practices approach set out by Lillis (2001, p.31) in the following section, by placing it into a theoretical context and illustrating the theoretical development of such a viewpoint.

The Social Practices approach has developed from work in New Literacy Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis[9] and argues for,

> ...a shift away from thinking of language or writing skills as individual possession, towards the notion of an individual engaged in socially situated action; from an individual student having writing skills, to a student doing writing in specific contexts (Lillis, 2001, p.31).

New Literacy Studies has developed from the field of ethnography and is based on the work of researchers such as Street (1994), Gee (1990), and Barton and Hamilton (1998) amongst others. According to Street (2003) literacy is a social practice and

> ...entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power. NLS, then, takes nothing for granted with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated, problematizing what counts as literacy at any time and place and asking 'whose literacies' are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant (p.77).

[9] See p.14 for a fuller definition

Street argues for a significant shift in perspective in the way in which literacy is viewed. He challenges the idea of one dominant and 'autonomous' literacy in favour of

> ...an 'ideological' model of literacy, that recognizes a multiplicity of literacies; that the meanings and uses of literacy practices are related to specific cultural contexts; and that these practices are always associated with relations of power and ideology, they are not simply neutral technologies (Street, 1994, p.139).

Street argues that an autonomous model of literacy puts forward the idea that the dominant form of literacy is the only form of literacy and that any other literacies, such as those practised by children or different cultural groups are seen as incorrect uses of the dominant literacy practice rather than real alternatives. Street discusses the idea of an ideological model of literacy to highlight the fact that the standard version of literacy is an ideological choice and not the only variety available[10]. The choice to promote the dominant literacy practice is, therefore, an issue of power (Street, 1994, p.142). He claims that the ideological model

> ...offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another [and] ...is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being (Street, 2003, p.77).

Barton and Hamilton (1998) also see literacy as a social practice and further develop the Social Practices approach with their ethnographic study of the literacy practices of a Lancaster community. They establish their Social Practices approach, stating that literacy is a set of social practices that 'can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p.7) and that literacy practices 'are patterned by social institutions and

[10] Street has been criticized for not having a grounded version of ideology. See Pennycook (2001), p. 77.

power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible, and influential than others' (p.7). Barton and Hamilton (1998) also emphasise the fact that 'literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices' (p.7). In common with Street (1984, 2003), Barton and Hamilton (1998) make a distinction between a literacy event and literacy practice where literacy events 'are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, p.7) and where there is usually a text or talk around a text at the centre of the event itself. In contrast, literacy practices are social processes which 'connect people with one another' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, p.7) and 'are shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, p.7).

It is this 'social turn' embodied in the work of researchers in New Literacy Studies that informs the work of Lillis. If we transfer the ideas described above to the institution of the university in the UK we can argue, as Lillis does (Lillis, 2001), that there is one dominant literacy practice that is promoted and practiced and considered to be the only valid literacy practice in UK Higher Education. Lillis calls this practice 'essayist literacy' (Lillis, 2001, p.20). She discusses the way that certain ways of meaning are privileged and the way that the essay, 'a particular way of constructing knowledge which has come to be privileged within the academy' (Lillis, 2001, p.20), acts as the primary way to assess students' knowledge and therefore determine their success or failure within the university system. This perspective explains why the alternative literacy practices of 'non-traditional' students or 'students from social groups historically excluded from higher education' (Lillis, 2001, p.16) and L2[11] students' writing is often viewed as deficient rather than as an alternative choice to the dominant discourse practice. In other words,

[11] By which I mean students for whom English is a second language

> It privileges the discursive routines of particular social groups whilst dismissing those of people who, culturally and communally, have access to and engage in a range of other practices (Lillis, 2001, p.39).

In terms of my own study, one of the most crucial elements to take from the Social Practices approach is that a command of the dominant essayist literacy practice requires extensive training and schooling. The UK education system works towards preparing students for this particular essayist practice and so L2 students who have been educated in a different education system with different literacy practices will not be familiar with the expectations of the UK university system. These students are then required to learn to write, not only in another language, but in a way that conforms to an ideologically motivated practice which is not made explicit[12]. Gee highlights the difficult nature of this task for students when he tells us,

> Unfortunately, schools as currently constituted tend to be good places to practice mainstream literacy once you have its foundations, but they are not good places to acquire these foundations (Gee, 1994, p.188).

Although this quotation is obviously referring to schools and not universities, I believe the argument is still valid. Those students who have already been schooled in essayist literacy practices will not struggle to deal with these practices at university level but those who have not had access to privileged practices will not, in the current university system, be explicitly taught about them. Therefore, as Gee (1994) argues, students who are not already familiar with the requirements will be disadvantaged, compared to those who already have what is considered to be the appropriate knowledge[13].

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[12] It is important to note that it is also difficult for home students as these practices are not explicitly taught.
[13] I will return to a detailed discussion of a Social Practices approach in section 2.4 'Establishing an academic identity' on p.43

I would like to move on to discuss the way that Critical Applied Linguistics as discussed by Pennycook in *Critical Applied Linguistics: A critical introduction.* (2001) informs my approach to my study.

Pennycook (2001) deals with the complex relationship between theory and practice. He claims that it his intention to look at `applied linguistics in all its contexts as a constant reciprocal relation between theory and practice' (Pennycook, 2001, p.3) and draws on Simon (1992) to define this relation as `that continuous reflexive integration of thought, desire and action sometimes referred to as "praxis"' (Simon 1992, p. 49 cited in Pennycook, 2001, p.3). Essentially, Pennycook is arguing for a particular way of analyzing the relationship between theory and practice that does not see it as a straightforward linear process. Rather than considering it to be linear in nature it is more beneficial to shift perspective and view them as more `complexly interwoven' (Pennycook, 2001, p.3). A major criticism that Pennycook has of critical approaches, is that there is a preoccupation with theory which has not resulted in the production of concrete activities for the language classroom (Benesch, 2001). Harwood and Hadley (2004) discuss this 'urgent need for Critical EAP[14] to focus on implementation' (Harwood and Hadley, p.9) In undertaking this study, I approach it from the perspective that theory and practice have a complex reciprocal relationship and that the purpose of this study is not simply to theorise but to ground observations in particular contexts and to consider how these particular contexts may have an effect on the critical approach I have taken[15]. This reciprocality is fundamental to a critical approach.

[14] English for Academic Purposes

[15] This reciprocal relationship is also reflected in the structure of Part 2 of this thesis. Rather than having Chapters that begin with a discussion of theory and move on to discussion of the data I have chosen to introduce theory as it becomes relevant to the discussion of the data. Although this may be an unconventional approach, it reflects the idea of praxis developed by Pennycook (2001), p.24.

Central to the notion of a critical applied linguistics or CALx as Pennycook chooses to call it (Pennycook, 2001, p.1), is an understanding of the term 'critical'. We might ask what it means to be critical. Pennycook outlines three positions relating to the term `critical`. The first of these is where the term is used in the notion of `critical thinking', which is seen as `a way of bringing more rigorous analysis to problem solving or textual understanding' (Pennycook, 2001, p.4). Pennycook discusses the way that the notion of `critical thinking' is often broken down into a set of analytical skills that may be taught to and employed by students in the analysis of texts. Pennycook highlights the fact that, although it is an essential skill to be able to analyze and critique, it is problematic to advocate, as applied linguists such as Widdowson (1999) have done, an objective and critically distant stance. For Pennycook, it is impossible to accept the possibility of a completely objective stance.

Pennycook claims there are two major positions in critical work which oppose this `centrist-autonomous approach'[16] (Pennycook, 2001, p.29). The first position, Pennycook labels the `emancipatory-modernist approach' (Pennycook, 2001, p.36). He cites the work of Fairclough (1996), Kress (1990), Wodak (1996) and Philipson (1992) as being included in this approach[17] although he does acknowledge that this grouping together of CDA theorists may be seen as controversial[18]. He claims that work within this field aims to reveal the overtly political nature of language and uncover the ways in which these political aspects of language are concealed[19]. Pennycook states that they,

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[16] Pennycook also calls this approach 'Liberal Ostrichism' (2001, p.29). This approach argues that applied linguistics should remain detached from political views.

[17] Although Pennycook has grouped these figures together, and although they are considered to be representative of researchers in Critical Linguistics or Critical Discourse Analysis, it is essential to bear in mind that, as Wodak, states, the network of scholars are'bound together more by a research agenda and programme than by some common theory or methodology' (Wodak, 2001, p.4).

[18] Indeed he is criticized for this by Fairclough (2003). Pennycook argues that they should not be seen as discrete categories or groupings but in order 'to compare, I have compartmentalized' (Pennycook ,2001, p.44)

[19] Wodak has defined the work of Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis as 'fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination,

> May accept the possibility that critical distance and objectivity are important and achievable but argues that the most significant aspect of critical work is an engagement with political critiques of social relations
>
> (Pennycook, 2001, p. 4).

It is an important tenet of this approach that all attempts to reveal the political ideology of language should be conducted from a rational and scientific point of view,

> ...while drawing on a neo-Marxist analysis of power and ideology and making awareness and emancipation its ultimate goals, it adheres to a hierarchy of knowledge production that places the scientific at the summit (Pennycook, 2001, p.37).

Although Pennycook acknowledges the significant contribution of mainstream critical discourse analysis to his own work, he highlights the problems inherent in this approach. Firstly, and most fundamentally, the version of power employed in CDA depends on a Marxist framework, where the dominant group, or 'dominant bloc' (Fairclough, 1989, p.33), in society have the power to control the rest of society. Thornborrow emphasises this when she states

> ...their analyses tended to be based on the idea that power and ideology are visible in systems of predetermined and socially fixed meanings, rather than a concept of power in discourse as something plural, negotiable and constantly shifting (Thornborrow, 2002, p.15).

Pennycook believes this neo-Marxist[20] framework is inadequate, as it oversimplifies the division between the *oppressors* and the *oppressed*, and assumes that the main source of power in society is economic power. Indeed, Fairclough states

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power and control as manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized, and so on by language use (or in discourse)' (Wodak, 2001, p.2). See also Meyer (2001) for a discussion of approaches of CDA.

[20] Pennycook refers to this approach as neo-Marxist as although work in this field accepts the Marxist divide between science and ideology, it moves on to directly relate political analysis to language use.

> ...it is not acceptable to regard gender, race and so forth as simply parallel to class. I shall regard class relations as having a more fundamental status than others, and as setting the broad parameters within which others are constrained to develop... (Fairclough, 1989, p.34)

This approach is limiting in the fact that it denies the potential of other forms of power and discrimination such as gender, race, and culture.

Pennycook's second criticism of the emancipatory-modernist approach is centred on the version of ideology that is used in this framework. He argues that it 'presents us with problems regarding truth and reality' as it suggests that ideology is, again, considered to be a tool of the oppressors (Pennycook, 2001, p. 38). According to Pennycook, this straightforward division of society and its resources 'obscures the reality behind social relations' (Pennycook, 2001, p. 38). He turns to a discussion of Foucault, in order to illustrate the problem with the Marxist view of ideology employed by CDA. As Mills identifies

> For many working with a vulgar Marxist model, ideology implied a simplistic and negative process whereby individuals were duped into using conceptual systems which were not in their own interests. Discourse, because of its lack of alliance to a clear political agenda, offered a way of thinking about hegemony - people's compliance in their own oppression – without assuming that individuals are necessarily simply passive victims of systems of thought (Mills, 1997, p.30).

Foucault's notion of discourse provides an alternative perspective to the notion of ideology as he points out several problems with the term. The first problem is that ideology 'always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth' (Foucault, 1980b, p.118). In other words, if one purports to be able to analyse ideology, one is claiming to be doing so from a position outside of that ideology, which would imply a position of truth. For

Foucault, this position is impossible as one is always inside discourse. According to Foucault, one is able to resist or comply with these discourses but not stand outside of them and critique them from a position of 'truth'.

In addition to the problem of ideology and truth, Foucault objects to the fact that 'ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant' (Foucault, 1980b, p.118). Whereas the Marxist view of ideology sees ideology as being produced by the dominant group in order to control society, Foucault objects to the primacy of economic relations over any other. This leads to a reformulation of the concept of power to move away from a repressive idea of power simply used as a tool of control, towards a more productive model of power[21]. Drawing on Foucault, Pennycook contends that

> If we take power as already sociologically defined (as held by dominant groups) and we see our task as using linguistic analysis of texts to show how that power is used, our task is never one of exploration, only of revelation. If, on the other hand, we are prepared to see power as that which is to be explained, then our analyses of discourse aim to explore how power may operate, rather than to demonstrate its existence (Pennycook, 2001, p.93).

In other words, a reliance on a Marxist framework with its existing sociological model of power, has a limiting effect on the study of language. This criticism has direct application to the work of Fairclough and others in CDA. However, using Foucault's model of power, and

[21] Pennycook summarizes Foucault's approach to power in the following seven points: 1) Power is not something owned or possessed but rather something that operates through society, 2) Power does not have some ultimate location or origin, 3) Relations of power are not outside other relations but are part of them, 4) There is no position outside power and no position from which one can arrive at the 'truth' outside relations of power, 5) Power is always linked to resistance, 6) Power is not merely repressive but is also productive, 7) It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together.

assuming that there cannot be an analysis of power that exists prior to the analysis of language, provides opportunity for a more open and exploratory approach.

Returning to Pennycook's criticisms of the emancipatory-modernist approach of mainstream critical linguistics, he is also dissatisfied with their preoccupation with knowledge that claims to be scientific fact. He argues that claiming to be involved in the search for scientific fact causes problems with the idea of objectivity and truth and also illustrates an inability to be self-reflexive, which is one of the most important aspects of what critical work should be. Fairclough (2003) responds to this criticism by agreeing with Pennycook to a certain extent by acknowledging that

> ...science *can* be part of the problem, knowledge *can* be set against ideology in dogmatic and elitist ways, knowledge which purports to be emancipatory *can* be a resource for power (Fairclough, 2003, p.808).

However, Fairclough does not believe that these reasons constitute enough reason to abandon the concepts altogether. He states

> The issue is not science or no science, it is good science or bad science; the issue is not a 'restive' and potentially self-indulgent blanket scepticism towards all knowledge, it is which claims to knowledge are more adequate; and the issue is not whether we should abandon the concept of ideology...,it is how we can deploy it in non-dogmatic ways (Fairclough, 2003, p.808).

Although Fairclough(2003) argues for the non-dogmatic employment of science and ideology, I would argue that Foucault's perspective on the problems concerned with these terms ultimately undermines his position[22]. Fairclough (2003) also argues that Pennycook's position, by refuting claims to scientific objectivity and disagreeing with the concept of ideology, slides

[22] See pp. 16-17

into relativism (Fairclough, 2003, p.807). In response, Pennycook defends his 'problematizing practice' position by arguing that this position affords more scope to be able to 'deal with difference without overriding others' views with claims to science and rationality' (Pennycook, 2003, p.811), and that the issue 'is indeed 'not science or no science' but neither is it just 'good science or bad science'. The issue has to do with claims to knowledge in the name of science' (Pennycook, 2003, p.811). His defence of his position relies on Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse and the way that claims to science are a combination of power and knowledge that constitute part of the problem[23].

Pennycook believes that any critical approach must provide an 'alternative vision or strategy for change' (Pennycook, 2001, p.39). Indeed, Wodak claims that

> Critical theories, thus also CL and CDA, are afforded special standing as guides for human action. They are aimed at producing enlightenment and emancipation. Such theories seek not only to describe and explain, but also to root out a particular kind of delusion. Even with differing concepts of ideology, critical theory tends to create awareness in agents of how they are deceived about their own needs and interests (Wodak, 2001, p.10).

It is this belief that brings about another of Pennycook's criticisms of the emancipatory-modernist approach. Pennycook claims that this critical approach only provides us with two problematic alternatives. One alternative would be to change relations in society so that this change in power is reflected in a change in language. This is unworkable, as Pennycook points out that any individual empowerment would reproduce inequalities rather than change them. The second alternative is to `focus on removing ideological obfuscation, leading to emancipation through awareness' (Pennycook, 2001, p.39). In other words, by making people

[23] See Pennycook (2001) p.84.

aware of the way that language is used to reproduce power relations and ideological meaning, it is possible for them to become empowered and take action to emancipate themselves. Although this sounds attractive, Pennycook illustrates the problematic nature of such a view. We have to be aware that this approach can be seen as patronizing. To advocate this emancipatory stance implies that large groups of people are generally `duped' (Pennycook, 2001, p.40) and need liberating from their disadvantaged position.

A further criticism of this approach is the fact that this emancipatory-modernist stance seems to suggest that once the`truth' has been revealed to people they can become empowered and emancipate themselves. But what does emancipation mean in this case? The emancipatory-modernist approach suggests that there is an `enlightened state' (Pennycook, 2001, p.40) which seems to suggest a state that exists outside relations of power. The problem here is clear. There is no state that exists outside the relations of power, although there may, of course, be a different state that exists under different relations of power. In suggesting that emancipation is achievable, it would seem that the emancipatory-modernists may also be guilty of a similar kind of duping.

It is these criticisms of the emancipatory-modernist approach which lead to the critical approach that Pennycook has termed the `postmodern-problematizing position' (Pennycook, 2001, p.4). It is this position that informs my work in this study. Although Pennycook draws heavily on the work of mainstream Critical Linguists and Critical Discourse Analysts to inform his own work and believes that critical work should always be `engaging with questions of power and inequality' (Pennycook, 2001, p.4), he rejects the idea that there is any possibility of achieving critical objectivity. Pennycook states,

> This *post* position views language as inherently political; understands power more in terms of its micro operations in relation to questions of class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on; and argues that we must also account for the politics of knowledge. Rather than continuing to see scientific endeavour as a means to further critical work, this view sees science – or claims to scientificity – as part of the problem (Pennycook, 2001, p.42).

Pennycook argues that all knowledge is political. It is essential, in this thesis, to recognise that although my work contains factual information in the form of extracts from the student and lecturer interviews, the way that the information has been gathered, analyzed, categorized and presented is shaped by my own interpretation and evaluation of what is interesting or revealing and this is necessarily influenced by my own position as a woman, mother, wife, student, observer, participant, researcher and writer. The information that I have chosen to include or exclude is not based on critical objectivity but is representative of my interpretation of the data. As Leki (2001) states,

> ...in any in-depth study undertaken in a postmodern context and that tries to (re)construct or (re)present human behaviours and motivations in order to understand them, the researcher and the reader of the report cannot help but be aware of the impossibility of telling the truth. We construct stories, not the truth, stories that we interpret on the basis of the details we select (Leki, 2001, p.18).

Sanger (1996) reinforces this point when he says

> Neutrality is hardly a likely status for the researcher in a society which is so overwhelmingly political at every level (Sanger, 1996, p.15).

With this in mind, it is essential to point out that, although the data in this study cannot be entirely neutral, it is both internally and externally valid. According to Merriem (1988), the case

study researcher can improve the generalizability of their research findings by ensuring a detailed and 'thick' description[24] of the phenomenon under study, establishing the typicality of the case and by using more than one case to examine an issue (Merriem, 1988, p.177). In an attempt to achieve generalizability of results, I have ensured that this study meets these criteria. I provide rich data for analysis, I establish that the work of these participants is representative of the work of other L2 students, and this is further enhanced by having four representative case studies from the same sample group, providing an opportunity for deeper analysis and providing a wider picture from which the reader may recognize similarities and draw inferences applicable to their own situations.

This postmodern-problematizing approach necessarily entails a number of other factors that Pennycook has referred to as Critical Applied Linguistic Concerns (2001, p.11). The most important of these concerns that relate to my own study are 'micro and macro relations', 'problematizing given' and 'self-reflexivity'. I would like to lay out clearly here what each of these terms means. Micro and macro relations refer to the fact that a Critical Applied Linguistic approach to the study of language should always relate 'aspects of applied linguistics to broader social, cultural, and political domains' (Pennycook, 2001, p.5). CALx takes this engagement with social relations a step further and insists that we consider the way that historical factors have worked to establish social relations and to view social relations as problematic. Our purpose then is not simply to make links between micro and macro levels but to question these links at a critical level. This leads into the idea of problematizing

[24] According to Geertz (1973), the ethnographer is faced with ' a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render' (p.10) and that 'Doing ethnography is like trying to read(in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour' (p.10). Essentially, he argues that the researcher must provide enough detailed description of the context of a sign to make it understandable to an 'outsider'. This entails providing as much detail as possible.

elements which are seen to be givens that is essential to a Critical Applied Linguistic stance. For a truly critical stance, it is essential to question assumptions and make the familiar unfamiliar in order to ensure that one is not simply accepting definitions and categories as part of an unquestioned discourse. It is essential to problematize these givens in an effort to be critical. Just as it is important to problematize categories and terms, it is essential to be self-reflexive and to be aware of one's own position. Pennycook points out that this 'problematizing stance must also be turned on itself' and `raise questions about the limits of its own knowing' (2001, p.8). As a researcher, it is essential that I am also continuously self-reflexive, questioning my own ideas and assumptions and attempting to make my own positions clear. It is also essential to make my position as researcher and writer of this study as clear as possible.

To summarize, by taking a social practices approach to the analysis of L2 students' writing experience and considering the principles involved in a Critical Applied Linguistic approach to language, this study examines the way that L2 student writers attempt to establish an academic writer identity within their chosen disciplines. As discussed above, it is essential in any critical approach to problematize given terms. Consequently, in the following chapter, I analyse the concept of identity and establish a definition that will be used throughout this study.

Chapter 2

Identity and the L2 Writer

2.1 Examining identity

Any study concerned with the concept of identity must necessarily consider the contributions of research from a number of different disciplines and theoretical perspectives. As Canagarajah (2004) points out, this interdisciplinarity might add to a sense of confusion but it is also an 'exhilarating time of fresh thinking' (p.266) and although contributions from wide-reaching perspectives provide a possible overabundance of information, there is a common ground amongst them. Canagarajah (2004) highlights the 'evolving consensus in orienting to selfhood as multiple, conflictual, negotiated, and evolving' (p.267). In other words, identity is no longer seen as something that is static and 'given' as some socio-psychological approaches have suggested[25], but is something that is negotiated within discourse. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) discuss the 'discursive turn' (p.30) in the perception of identity, detailing the way in which approaches to identity have undergone transformation from the essentialized inner self of the Enlightenment, based on 'a growing secularization, the use of reason, experimental scientific method and an emphasis on individuality' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.19), through the romanticized, innate self based on 'feeling rather than cognition' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.19), of the Romantic movement. They then move on to a discussion of the postmodern idea of the self as fluid and decentred. Benwell and Stokoe (2006) proceed to a discussion of the way that sociological accounts of identity in the second half of the twentieth century concentrated on the concept of 'collective identities' (p.24), and the way in which these approaches were criticized for their treatment of identity as a pre-discursive construct. Finally, the historical account of approaches to identity leads us to a discussion of poststructuralism

[25] For a fuller discussion of this issue see Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) and Benwell and Stokoe (2006).

and Foucault, signifying the 'discursive turn' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.30). According to Benwell and Stokoe

> In Foucault's account, identities (or subjects) are regarded as the product of dominant discourses that are tied to social arrangements and practices (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.30).

Mills (1997) also illustrates Foucault's perspective on identity

> Foucault sees the self as an effect of discursive structures – an effect that nevertheless interacts with those structures, but which is not foundational in itself (Mills, 1997, p.103).

Identity is no longer seen as something which exists independently within the subject, an essential inner quality, but is seen as constantly shifting and constructed in discourse 'in a series of representations mediated by semiotic systems such as language' (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p.31). Benwell and Stokoe (2006) acknowledge the criticisms of Foucault's work, which suggest that Foucault has erased the concept of the subject, or at least rendered it ineffective as it is simply constructed by discourse and lacking in agency[26]. To illustrate the way that this criticism has been dealt with, the authors discuss research in the fields of Critical Discourse Analysis, discursive psychology, conversation analysis and ethnomethodology and highlight the fact that all these different approaches share in common a focus on the fact that language is 'the site of identity work' (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006, p.34). My own study contributes to research in this area, assuming that identity is constructed in language through a negotiation between different discourses.

As Pavlenko and Blackledge state

> ...identities are constructed at the interstices of multiple axes, such as age, race, class, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitical locale, institutional

[26] See Benwell and Stokoe (2006), p.34.

affiliation, and social status, whereby each aspect of identity redefines and modifies all others (2004, p.16).

As well as being constructed within discourse and having multiple subjectivities, Canagarajah (2004) claims that it is commonly accepted in the field of applied linguistics that these multiple subjectivities or identities have unequal status and power and these inequalities lead to 'conflict within and between subjects' (Canagarajah, 2004, p.267), and that

> ...in order to find coherence and empowerment, the subject has to negotiate these competing identities and subject positions in relation to the changing discursive and material contexts (Canagarajah, 2004, p.267).

It is this negotiation of identity which forms the focus of my own study. However, at this point it is necessary to clarify certain terms that will be critical to our discussion. With the abundance of research from differing fields concerned with the study of identity, there also comes an abundance of terms to consider. Canagarajah (2004) emphasises this point in his discussion of his own experience.

> In recent conferences and publications, I find scholars using constructs such as the following: identities (and their qualified variants, linguistic identity, cultural identity, national identity, the 'scientist-researcher' identity, and ghetto identity – which are not all on a par), identity positioning, subjectivity, subject positions, ranks, roles, selves, and voice (Canagarajah, 2004, p.266).

Canagarajah (2004) chooses to distinguish the concept of voice from the constructs of identity, role, and subjectivity, and defining voice as 'a manifestation of one's agency in discourse through the means of language' (Canagarajah, 2004, p.267). He claims this

> ...largely rhetorically constructed manifestation of selfhood has to be negotiated in relation to our historically defined *identities* (such as race, ethnicity, and nationality),

> institutional *roles* (like student, teacher, and administrator in the educational institution), and ideological *subjectivity* (i.e. our positioning according to discourses such as 'responsible citizen/lazy immigrant/dependent foreigner,' or 'authoritative native-speaker/blundering non-native speaker,' which embody values according to the dominant ideologies in the society) (Canagarajah, 2004, p.267).

Canagarajah (2004) argues that identities, roles and subjectivities can be imposed upon an individual from an external source, whereas voice is controlled and exercised by the individual themselves or in Canagarajah's terms

> it is at the level of voice that we gain agency to negotiate these categories of the self, adopt a reflexive awareness of them, and find forms of coherence and power that suit our interests (Canagarajah, 2004, p.268)[27].

Although Canagarajah provides a useful definition of voice, the distinction between identities, roles and subjectivities is more arbitrary. For example, I would argue that an institutional role, like that of student, could equally be referred to as an institutional identity, as the student would be constructed, not only according to their institutional role but also according to the historically and socially defined status of what a 'student' is. The term 'role' could, therefore, be said to be subsumed into the term 'identity' or be seen as a particular facet of identity.

In addition to this, I would like to argue that Canagarajah's (2004) definition of voice implies a very optimistic stance towards the opportunity for negotiation of identities in the academic context. Although Canagarajah (2004) recognizes that academic writing has 'rigidly imposed conventions' he believes that 'discourses and institutions cannot be totally deterministic'

[27] It is important to recognise that some theorists, like Foucault, see 'agency' as problematic, '...within discourse theory, questions of agency are less clear and, as a consequence, questions of how much control one has over what happens as a result of one's own actions are very much to the fore' (Mills, 1997, p.30. In other words, although an individual may have one intention in performing an action there will be other consequences that one has no control over.

(Canagarajah, 2004, p.268), and that 'there is always room to negotiate, modify and reconfigure – if not resist - dominant discourses' (Canagarajah, 2004, p.268). I would agree with this position; however, in terms of the case studies presented in this study, I would argue that the institutional conditions surrounding the students' attempts to present an academic writer identity in their second language writing, make it very difficult for the student to attempt such negotiation[28].

2.2 Voice and the L2 student

At this point it is necessary to look at the notion of voice in more detail. There is much discussion around the issue of voice in current applied linguistic and second language writing research, a large amount of which centres around the usefulness of voice as a theoretical tool (see Bowden, 1999; Clark, 1997; Elbow, 1994; Ivanic, 1997; Johnstone, 1996; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996; Shen, 1989; Yancey, 1994). One particular part of this research which seems to dominate the discussions of voice is the idea that voice is a construct directly connected to Western individualism, with the assumption of an autonomous self[29]. Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) argue that an individualistic notion of voice pervades mainstream US society, even though it may not be explicitly recognised. They claim that

> The core notion underlying this social practice seems to be that, as individuals, we all have essentially private and isolated inner selves, which we give outward expression to through the use of a metaphorical 'voice' (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p.47).

They further claim that such a view of voice can be problematic for L2 students coming from different cultural backgrounds as 'the notion of the individual varies substantially across cultures' (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p.51). They discuss the fact that many cultures value

[28] See discussions in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.
[29] See discussion in Bowden (1999)

collectivism rather than individualism and this may affect the students' ability to construct an effective voice in their English writing.

In support of their argument, they cite a number of studies including the work of Shen (1989), a Chinese student who immigrated to the US. In his article, Shen (1989) discusses the problems he encountered in trying to establish an acceptable academic voice. He reveals

> In order to write good English, I knew that I had to be myself, which actually meant not to be my Chinese self. It meant that I had to create an English self and be *that* self. And to be that English self....I had to accept the way a Westerner accepts himself in relation to the universe and society (Shen, 1989, p.461 cited in Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p.55).

Matsuda (2001), in his discussion of voice and individualism, considers his own experience as an international undergraduate in the US, and expresses empathy with Shen's (1989) experience. However, he highlights the fact that his own problems stemmed from the problematic idea of an essentialized notion of the self[30]. Significantly, Matsuda(2001) draws attention to the fact that it is not only L2 postgraduate students who may experience difficulty with this notion of the self but native speakers as well, although this is less likely as they will be more familiar with the discursive practices that surround the issue. Of his own experience, he writes

> Being 'myself' did not seem to me to mean representing the 'self' that I construct when I talk to my English-speaking friends or the one I construct when I am with my teachers. Did it mean my Japanese self- how I generally see myself when I am in Japan? But I was also aware that, when I was in Japan, I constructed and represented my 'self' in various ways because of the socially sanctioned values and codes of behaviour that were partly embedded in the Japanese language through features such as honorifics and

[30] See p. 25 for a discussion of this

> various address terms...Upon reflection, I came to understand that 'finding my own voice' was not the process of discovering the 'true self' that was within myself (which, to me, didn't exist in the first place); it was the process of negotiating my socially and discursively constructed identity with the expectation of the reader as I perceived it (Matsuda, 2001, p.37).

Arising from Matsuda's discussion of constructing a voice in his own writing, as well as his engagement with the critiques of voice and individualism,[31] is the clear idea that, although the concept of voice has been used as a sign to represent the ideology of individualism, this is not the only way that voice should be used. There are other possibilities and ways of utilizing the notion of voice. Johnstone (1996) states, in defence of this position

> while ideological *individualism* is not universal, human *individuality* is (Matsuda, 2001, p.38),

And so, therefore, Matsuda argues

> If voice is not unique to sites of discursive practices that valorize individualism, it follows that evidence of voice can be found in any language – even in languages that are often associated with 'collectivist' values ((Matsuda, 2001, p.38).

At this point it is very important to point out, as Hirvela and Belcher (2001) have done, that it is problematic to assume that all L2 students need to be 'taught how to develop or acquire a voice' (Hirvela and Belcher, 2001, p.83), as many postgraduate students will already be experienced in writing in their own language and will have some concept of their own writing identity[32]. Hirvela and Belcher state that these writers

[31] See Bowden (1999) and Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999)

[32] Hirvela and Belcher (2001) discuss three case studies of international postgraduate students who had significant academic writing experience in their native language and the various problems they faced in trying to establish an acceptable academic voice in their L2. See also Abasi et al. (2006). This article compares more and less experienced L2 writers and analyses their awareness of their own authorial identities.

> ...have already learned how to establish relationships with the texts they create and the readers they address. Thus, they are not voiceless or devoid of a writerly identity when they enter our classrooms (2001, p.83).

It is important to consider the 'life history' (Ivanic, 1999) of the students and the ways in which their past experiences inform the present positions in their writing[33]. Hirvela and Belcher (2001) explain

> The more we understand these life histories as they relate to students' background as writers, the better we are able to construct the teaching of voice to account meaningfully for those backgrounds (Hirvela and Belcher, 2001, p.87).

In their discussion of voice as an analytical device, Hirvela and Belcher (2001) consider additional constructions of voice that are useful in an L2 context. They also discuss Shen's (1989) account of creating a new academic voice, as Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) have done, but conclude that stories like this 'are not simply stories of cultural or rhetorical imposition' (Hirvela and Belcher, 2001, p.85) but reveal that students may reveal positive feelings about the process of discovering an additional voice rather than seeing it as an imposition. They choose the following quotation from Shen (1994) to give support to their view:

> I welcome the change, for it has added a new dimension to me and to my view of the world. I am not saying that I have entirely lost my Chinese identity. In fact, I feel that I will never lose it (Shen, 1989, p.465 cited in Hirvela & Belcher, 2001, p.85).

They argue that, although accounts like these reveal that students struggle to make these transitions in identity, they also show us that students may be appreciative of the situation, once the transition has occurred, as they are then in possession of another voice or another perspective to add to their repertoire. Hirvela and Belcher (2001) state

[33] See also Lillis's (2001) discussion of the importance of considering students' life experiences in any discussion of their writing.

> Therefore, we need to better understand the nature of these struggles so as to more effectively serve the needs of our students and help them to find means of self-representation in written English that complement rather than replace the identities they possess when they come to our writing classes (Hirvela and Belcher, 2001, p.86).

To conclude this section, it is necessary to clarify the position that I will take on identity in this study and to establish the definitions that will be used throughout this text. As Hall (1996) points out, although the term 'identity' has been deconstructed[34] it has not been replaced. He says

> ...the deconstructive approach puts key concepts 'under erasure'. This indicates that they are no longer serviceable – 'good to think with' – in their originary and unreconstructed form. But since they have not been superseded dialectically, and there are no other, entirely different concepts with which to replace them, there is nothing to do but to continue to think with them – albeit now in their detotalized or deconstructed forms... (Hall, 1996, p.1)

Although identity is a complex term, it is still essential to a discussion of the way students present themselves in their writing. As the discussion in this section has shown, I believe that identity is unworkable as a singular term and must be considered as multiple, as identities are constructed in the interaction between different discourses in different ways in different contexts. As well as considering identities as multiple, I consider it essential to establish a concept of identities that reflects the personal life histories of the students, as these life histories are discourses which are utilized in negotiation with the dominant discourses of the academic community. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to use the term 'academic

[34] Derrida's idea of deconstruction entails opening up texts to different meanings and interpretations by questioning the stability of binary oppositions within the text

writer identity', as I believe this also expresses the important fact that the students are already members of the academic community.

2.3 The link between identity and writing

> Academic writing is not just about conveying an ideational 'content', it is also about the representation of self (Hyland, 2002, p.1091).

As Hyland (2002) makes clear in this quotation, academic writing involves constructing identities as well as presenting content material and constructing knowledge. Establishing a convincing authorial or writer identity within the constraints of the target discourse community will enable the student writer to integrate into their academic community successfully. However, this is not a straightforward task for many inexperienced L2 writers. One of the greatest problems for students entering the university system is that they may struggle to negotiate a position for themselves within the dominant discourses. Students are often very confused about their status within the discourse community. They may be unsure as to whether they are writing as a subject who has a given right to be read as a respected member of the community or in an inferior position as a newcomer and apprentice, writing for an audience that is reading from a superior position. It is this confusion that often causes problems for writers.

In addition to this problem, the precarious position of the student new to the university system is compounded by the lack of familiarity with the conventions of academic discourse. Bartholomae states

> The students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as if they were members of the academy, or historians or anthropologists or economists; they have to invent the university by assembling and

> mimicking its language...They must learn to speak our language (Bartholomae, 1986, p.4-5).

As Bartholomae (1986) suggests, mimicking is an essential practice in becoming part of the academic discourse community but, in addition to the fact that students are not always provided with enough material to mimic, they can also be provided with conflicting discourse styles, thus making their dilemma worse. It is clear that there is great variation in styles of discourse, even within departments. Faced with such diversity within their own fields, the student may not be sure who they are expected to mimic and how to establish an identity of their own. Hyland (2002) emphasizes this point

> While it is clear that the conventions of personality are rhetorically constrained in academic writing, these constraints are uncertain, and the extent to which one can reasonably explicitly intrude into one's discourse, or assert one's personal involvement, remains a dilemma for novices and experienced writers alike. It is particularly problematic for students because they frequently feel positioned by the dominant disciplinary and institutional discourses they encounter in university studies, and the problem can be seriously compounded for NNSs[35] whose rhetorical identities may be shaped by very different traditions of literacy (Hyland, 2002, p.1092).

The way that writers construct identity in their texts has been analysed extensively by Ivanic (1998), Ivanic and Simpson (1992) and Hyland (1999). Ivanic (1998) claims that there are three aspects to a writer's identity. The *autobiographical self* is the 'self' which writers bring to an act of writing. In other words this 'self' encompasses the writer's past experiences and life histories. The *discoursal self* is the 'self' which writers rhetorically and linguistically construct in the act of

[35] Hyland is referring to non-native speakers

writing. Finally, the *self as author* is revealed in the degree of authoritativeness of the writer in their text.

Ivanic emphasises that these aspects of identity can only be constructed within the writer's immediate socio-cultural context. Ivanic labels these restrictions as 'possibilities for self-hood' and defines them as 'socially available subject positions, sustained by all forms of social practice' (Ivanic & Weldon, 1999, p.169). Writers, then, can represent their identities within their texts within the constraints of the particular discourse that is dominant in the writing situation. The writer identity that is portrayed is, therefore, a result of the negotiation between the writer and the discourse.

It is important to remember here that a writer will not assume one subject position and adhere to it throughout a text. As Ivanic and Camps (2001) point out, ' "identity" is typically not unitary but multiple, and hence texts are often polyphonic, or many-voiced' (p.30). A writer may choose several different positions throughout a text, in order to perform different functions; the writer is therefore constantly negotiating subject positions. According to Ivanic and Camps, 'writers do not construct these self-representations from an infinite range of possibilities but from culturally available resources' (Ivanic and Camps, 2001, p.5). This raises the important point that, if negotiating a subject position within academic discourse is difficult for a native speaker, the situation is more complicated for second language students, as they are less familiar with the conventions expected in the UK university system. Students who may be extremely competent in academic writing in their native language may find that the subject positions they are accustomed to inhabiting may not be suitable for the new context. Matsuda (2001) supports this argument in his discussion of voice in Japanese written discourse, where he argues that Japanese students who face problems constructing an individual voice in their

writing do not have problems because they do not understand the concept of voice or because of any cultural issues to do with an 'ideology of individualism' (Ramanathan and Atkinson, 1999) but simply because of an unfamiliarity with the academic discourse structures that are available to them in the new target situation. Matsuda states,

> ...those difficulties may be related to being deprived of familiar discursive options – such as multiple orthographic systems and a variety of personal pronouns as well as sentence-final particles – combined with the writers' lack of familiarity with the discourse features that are available in constructing voice in written English. (Matsuda, 2001, p.51)

An important question to ask here is whether these students should be forced to negotiate a completely different subject position for themselves or whether academic discourse is flexible enough to adapt to new styles of academic writing. Should second language writers be forced to adapt to a rigidly Anglocentric discourse community or can the discourse community negotiate a new position that encompasses different academic conventions? In answer to these questions Zamel states,

> Rather than serving the academy, accommodating it, and being appropriated by it, we ought to work with others to engage in an enterprise that is far more dynamic, complex, collaborative and intellectually engaging, an enterprise whereby we and our students contribute to, complicate and transform the academy (Zamel, 1993).

Ivanic and Camps (2001) suggest that there are three features of culturally available resources 'that offer the individual freedom and power over their self-representation' (Ivanic and Camps, 2001, p.7). Firstly, academic discourse is not a unified entity; there are many different ideas and interpretations of what constitutes academic discourse. Ivanic and Camps (2001) emphasise

the fact that 'in any cultural setting there are many voice-types in circulation' (p.7), thus offering the writer a degree of choice over which to employ. According to Ivanic and Camps (2001) the writer is free to choose one of the available options and therefore retains control over their self-representation.

Secondly, Ivanic and Camps (2001) claim that each individual act of self-representation is unique. They state

> The individual has a unique history of encounters with voices, and the freedom to select from the culturally available voice types and/or creatively recombine them in their own way, given the constraints of their own access to voice types, their relative assertiveness, and the degree of freedom in the institutional setting (Ivanic and Camps, 2001, p.7).

Although Ivanic and Camps (2001) argue that the writer is free to choose given a few constraints, I would argue that the constraints that are mentioned could possibly be so constricting as to disallow any real freedom of choice. In particular, the final constraint, the degree of freedom in the institutional setting, will vary dramatically from institution to institution, department to department and instructor to instructor. I suggest that the students who took part in my study may have been working within different degrees of freedom in their Pre-sessional courses and their Master's programmes. It might be possible to argue that a particular lecturer was more accepting of unconventional methods of personal expression than another departmental lecturer who might have a more inflexible idea of what academic writing should be. Although Ivanic and Camps (2001) argue that the individual has freedom to select and be creative with their written language given certain constraints, it seems that these constraints can be so restrictive in some areas as to override any real freedom.

The final feature of culturally available resources that Ivanic and Camps (2001) highlight is the fact that

> ...the possibilities for selfhood are never completely socially determined. There are often "patterns of privileging" ... among the various voice types in a particular institutional setting, but the individual can exercise the power to conform or to resist the social forces that are privileging one voice type over another (Ivanic and Camps, 2001, p.7).

Again, although it would be satisfying to assume that all students were in a position to resist the social forces that work to privilege certain voice types, it seems naïve to think that this is in fact the case. In theory, the writer does have the power to conform or resist but in practice this is extremely difficult for the inexperienced L2 writer. Many writers lack confidence in a new situation and would feel uncomfortable with challenging the norm. In addition to this, for some writers, it is difficult to work out what the norm is and so cannot effectively determine how to resist. From the opposite perspective, there is often little understanding from members of the established discourse community, when it comes to second language writing and what may be received as resistance to social forces over privileged discourse types by the writer may simply be perceived as a lack of understanding or ineptitude in following the rules of academic discourse by the teacher. In other words, the teacher may view the non-conformity of the writing as simply grammatical or discoursal second language errors and not credit the student with a conscious act of resistance or creativity.

In addition to the work of Ivanic (1998,1999, 2001), Hyland (1999, 2002) has also provided extensive new research in the area of writing and identity. Hyland's (2002) study into the use of the first person pronoun in academic writing specifically aims to examine the way that

authorial identity is constructed in L2 writing. From his examination and comparison of 64 Hong Kong undergraduate theses and a large corpus of published research articles, Hyland (2002) constructs a typology of the use of 'I' where 'I' is used for stating a goal/purpose, explaining a procedure, stating results/claims, expressing self-benefits, and elaborating an argument. The results of the study showed that the 'expert' writers were far more likely to use the first person pronoun and were therefore 'more willing to make a solid personal commitment to the most authorially powerful aspects of their texts' (Hyland, 2002. p.1099).

A detailed breakdown of the results of the study illustrates differences in the usage of the first person pronoun between the experts and the L2 students. Expressing self-benefits is, according to Hyland (2002), the least threatening function of authorial self-mention and is something that does not occur in the professional research texts. The use of 'I' in connection with explaining a procedure was the second most frequently used in the student texts. This is also classified by Hyland (2002) as a low risk strategy. The third relatively low risk strategy for the use of 'I' is for stating a purpose. Hyland's (2002) results showed that the L2 students displayed a higher usage in this category than the occurred in the professional texts. However, the high risk categories of elaborating an argument and stating results/claims revealed a great difference between the two groups, being mostly utilized by the professionals rather than the novices. Hyland (2002) indicates that this does not imply that the students did not have arguments or claims to state but rather that they lacked the confidence or conviction to overtly state them, preferring instead to create a distance from them through a number of rhetorical devices. Hyland states

> The students showed a clear preference for strategies of author invisibility when interpreting results, with the whole panoply of agentless passives, dummy 'it' subjects,

and the attribution of interpretations to tables or experiments employed to disguise the writer's role (Hyland, 2002, p.1105).

He suggests many possible reasons for this strategy, including the fact that teachers and style manuals give conflicting advice on the subject, or that the students are uncertain about disciplinary conventions (Hyland, 2002, p.1107). He also suggests that cultural difference and the notion of individualism might be an explanation for why students underuse the first person pronoun. However, as I discussed earlier[36], it is important to be cautious about attributing characteristics or behaviours simply to 'cultural difference'.

Hyland's (2002) study provides us with an insight into how identity is constructed within the written text. Research in a similar area by Tang and John (1999) concentrates on the use of 'I' as 'the most visible manifestation of a writer's presence in a text' (Tang & John, 1999, p.1). Like Hyland (2002), Tang and John (1999) illustrate that the first person pronoun is not a homogeneous entity and construct a typology of the use of 'I'[37]. The least powerful role that the first person pronoun can represent is that of 'I' as the representative. This is where the author aligns him/herself with a group of other people to make a claim. This rhetorical strategy, according to Tang and John (1999), 'effectively reduces the writer to a non-entity' (p.3). The next categorization, 'I' as the guide through the essay, refers to the way that the author provides signposts throughout the essay and draws the readers attention to points of interest. Again, this is a low risk role. The next category, 'I' as the architect of the essay, is similar to the guide but can be seen to be more powerful as the guide could simply be showing you, the reader, through the essay, whereas the architect is staking a claim for responsibility for

[36] See the discussion on p.31

[37] Their categorization, however, differs slightly from Hyland's as they also include the use of 'we', 'us', our' etc. whereas Hyland (2002) based his entirely on the use of 'I'.
Hyland (2002) argues that this strategy eradicates the problem of overlapping categories that seems to be a problem with Tang and John's (1999) typology.

the structure and organisation of the text that has been created. The next category, 'I' as the recounter of the research process, again, is a fairly low risk role as the author is simply describing the research process. The most powerful roles that Tang and John (1999) assigned to the use of 'I' are 'I' as the opinion holder and 'I' as the originator, where the opinion holder is 'the person who shares an opinion, view or attitude...with regard to known information or established facts' (Tang & John, 1999, p.3), and the originator 'involves the writer's conception of the ideas or knowledge claims which are advanced in the essay' (Tang & John, 1999, p.3). Results of the study showed that the most common uses of 'I' were in the least powerful roles of representative and guide, and that the most powerful roles of opinion holder and originator revealed the lowest occurrence rate.

Both Hyland (2002) and Tang and John (1999) explicitly reveal the way that identity is revealed in the written text. A study by Canagarajah (2004) also explores the link between writing and identity but places the emphasis on the way that L2 students negotiate and represent their identities in their writing in relation to the dominant discourses. Canagarajah analyses a number of student case studies to develop a taxonomy of strategies that students employ, which are avoidance, accommodation, opposition, appropriation and transposition (Canagarajah, 2004.p.284)[38]. He defines 'avoidance' as 'a somewhat one-sided move to the dominant discourses without sufficient negotiation with the other discourses one uses' (Canagarajah, 2004.p.274). Illustrating his argument with reference to a particular student case study, he argues that avoidance may be 'liberating' (Canagarajah, 2004.p.284). for the writer but that the text is not considered independent or original, and may be seen as lacking any kind of critical engagement. Accommodation, Canagarajah (2004) argues, 'is a more conscious

[38] 'The intention here is not to seek acceptance of this typology; it is rather to construct a heuristic that will help us to develop an integrated perspective by comparing the different studies emerging on writing and identity (Canagarajah, 2004.p.286).

internalization of the dominant discourses that differs from the somewhat hesitant and surface-level adoption displayed by avoidance' (Canagarajah, 2004.p.284). The case study used to discuss this strategy reveals a Finnish student who, as a writer, accommodates to the non-native, American identity, seemingly without expressing any sign of anxiety about suppressing their Finnish identity. The third case study presents a student who takes a stance against the dominant discourse and chooses to write an essay in his own vernacular way. Canagarajah (2004) emphasises that this strategy of 'opposition' also lacks any kind of critical engagement with the discourse situation and therefore

> Seeing little connection to the present rhetorical situation, the audience may rule the text as irrelevant, ascribing pejorative roles and identities to the writer. The writer may be denied entry into that communicative circle and the voice silenced (Canagarajah, 2004.p.285).

A more successful approach to the negotiation of identity is that of 'appropriation'. Canagarajah (2004) defines this as 'taking over dominant discourses and using them for one's own agendas' (p.281). The writer uses the dominant discourses but engages with them in such a way as to incorporate their own discourses. This is effective in representing the student's identity, satisfying the requirements of the dominant discourse community, and constructing an engaging and critical text. The final strategy that Cangarajah (2004) presents is that of 'transposition' which, he claims, 'defines itself dialectically by working against the conflicting discourses and forming a new discourse that transcends the earlier dichotomies' (Canagarajah, 2004.p.285). In other words, a student may exploit their knowledge of multiple discourses to create a new discourse that suits their purpose in a particular discourse situation.

Canagarajah (2004) emphasises the fact that strategies for negotiation of identity that engage with the dominant discourse conventions will be more successful than those that do not create

an independent but engaged voice. Crucially, Canagarajah (2004) highlights the important point that 'there is no voice outside discourses' (Canagarajah, 2004.p.287) and so dominant discourses cannot be ignored or discounted but have to be engaged with 'even for purposes of resistance' (Canagarajah, 2004.p.287).

This discussion of writing and identity has shown that writers construct identities in their texts. These identities are multiple and shifting and are negotiated in discourse through an interaction of life histories and the immediate context or discoursal situation of writing. I have also discussed different approaches to engaging with the construction of identity. I will now move on to examine approaches to teaching academic writing and show that an academic literacies approach to academic writing is more effective in engaging with the issues of identity and the social and political nature of writing.

2.4 Establishing an academic identity

In order to consider these issues in more detail, I will examine three approaches to academic writing in Higher Education. After discussing the study skills approach and the academic socialization approach to teaching academic writing, I will analyse the way in which a Social Practices approach provides the student writer with a stronger position from which to negotiate their identity within the academic community, as they will be more aware of the cultural and political context in which they are working.

Articles by Baynham (2000) and Lea and Street (2000) discuss three perspectives on academic writing. Although the terms are different, the three approaches are essentially the same. Baynham (2000) discusses a 'skills-based', a 'text-based' and a 'practice-based' approach (p.18).The skills based approach views the teaching of academic writing as providing students

with a set of discrete skills that may be used in a variety of academic contexts. The second approach, the 'text-based' approach (Baynham, 2000, p.18) assumes that each academic discipline is 'relatively homogeneous' (Baynham, 2000, p.18 and text types are 'to be discovered, analysed and taught' (Baynham, 2000, p.18). The third approach, the 'practice-based' approach views academic writing as involving both text and practice, which means that the student writer has to be taught about working within an academic discourse community as well as textual information. According to Baynham (2000) the student writers are required to take up a position within this community and these positions are 'conflictual, overlapping or indeed blurred' (p.18). Baynham argues

> A concept like 'writing position' cannot be fully or richly understood without a discipline-internal awareness of what counts as knowledge and what counts as an authoritative disciplinary position, and this includes the awareness of internal diversity and conflict, as realized in the politics of the discipline (Baynham, 2000, p.18).

Although Baynham (2000) argues for a shift towards the practice-based approach he also warns against disregarding a text-based approach, as it is the text which provides us with a substantial amount of information about the discipline and the way that a particular discipline constructs its knowledge. The text is a crucial part of the practice-based approach. This position is firmly supported by Hyland who also emphasises the need for a different approach but one that values the importance of the text. He argues,

> Clearly there is a real need for us to be more flexible in our pedagogies, more wide-ranging in our research, and more critical in our professional practices. But we need to hold fast to those things we have got right: a commitment to revealing the workings of other communicative worlds to our students by grounding pedagogical decisions in an understanding of target texts and practices (Hyland, 2002, p.8).

Alongside Baynham (2000), Lea and Street (2000) also emphasise the fact that the three approaches they discuss are not mutually exclusive, as there are inevitable areas of overlap. Lea and Street talk about a 'study skills' approach, an 'academic socialization' approach and an 'academic literacies' approach (Lea and Street, 2000, p.33). The following table, provided by Lea and Street (2000) summarizes the three models:

Table 1: Models of Student Writing in Higher Education

Study Skills

Student deficit

- 'fix it': atomized skills, surface language, grammar, spelling
- sources: behavioural and experimental psychology; programmed learning

Student writing as technical and instrumental skill

Academic Socialization

Acculturation of students into academic discourse

- inculcating students into new 'culture': focus on student orientation to learning and interpretation of learning task, e.g. 'deep', 'surface', 'strategic' learning; homogeneous 'culture'; lack of focus on institutional practices, change and power.
- sources: social psychology; anthropology; constructivism

Student writing as transparent medium of representation

Academic Literacies

Students' negotiation of conflicting literacy practices

- literacies as social practices: at level of epistemology and identities; institutions as sites of/constituted in discourses and power; variety of communicative repertoire, e.g. genres, fields, disciplines; switching with respect to linguistic practices, social meanings and identities
- sources: 'new literacy studies'; critical discourse analysis; systemic functional linguistics; cultural anthropology

Student writing as meaning making and contested

(Lea and Street, 2000, p.34)

The 'skills-based' (Baynham, 2000) or 'study skills' (Lea and Street, 2000) approach presents problems with writing as resulting from a perceived deficiency in the student and their ability to master the skills necessary to perform to the required academic standard. Researchers like Lea and Stierer (2000) have pointed out that this approach is the reason why the teaching of academic English is often consigned to separate English Language Units or study skills support departments or as Hyland says, 'shunted off into special units, and marginalised as a remedial exercise designed to fix-up students' problems' (Hyland, 2002, p.3). These units and departments can remain separate from the academic disciplines, because of the view that writing is an autonomous act. This view does not take into account the socially situated nature of writing and literacy.

Lillis (2001) also discusses the difference between a study skills approach and a practices or academic literacies approach and claims that

> Making a distinction between writing as a discrete skill and writing as social practice is not simply an intellectual exercise. What's at stake is the nature of students' participation in HE, and their subsequent life chances (Lillis, 2001, p.31).

For students to be able to negotiate a position for themselves within the academic discourse community, they have to be aware of the socio-historical and political nature of writing within their discipline. As Lea and Stierer state

> To understand what 'counts' as 'good writing' in higher education requires an understanding of the culture of individual academic disciplines – their histories, their positions relative to other disciplines, and the intellectual traditions which have led to certain genres of academic writing being perceived as self-evidently effective means for representing knowledge (Lea and Stierer, 2000, p.3).

I would argue then that a social practices or academic literacies approach to teaching academic writing would provide the student with more background knowledge and more disciplinary knowledge. Consequently, this would provide them with a firmer basis from which to commit themselves to negotiate a position within their academic community and establish an acceptable identity.

2.5 Perceptions of academic writing

Before discussing the link between identity and writing in more detail, it would be beneficial to examine attempts to define 'academic discourse'. Academic discourse 'has long been viewed as a unified register' (Bhatia, 2002, p.25). Bhatia claims that there has been a distinct lack of any systematic and detailed research into what we mean when we use the term 'academic discourse'. Bhatia states

> In principle, the use of the term 'academic discourse' presupposes the existence or at least an understanding of what might be called an 'academic core' underlying most of the discourse types used in the academy; however, in practice, the existence of such an academic core is often assumed, rather than investigated and established (Bhatia, 2002, p.25-6).

Although the terms 'academic discourse' and 'academic writing' are used universally, it seems that there is no universal agreement as to what these terms refer to. I would say that this muddled view of academic discourse stems from the tradition of viewing it as a 'unified register' (Bhatia, 2002) or, in other words, one format that is applicable to all academic situations, when this is clearly not the case. Recent research (see Hyland, 2000; Swales, 1990) has illustrated that there are significant differences in the types of academic discourse favoured in different academic fields and so, as Bhatia points out, it would be more productive to think

in terms of 'academic discourses' (Bhatia, 2002, p.34), rather than a single and unified 'discourse'. As Hyland states

> The discourses of the academy do not form an undifferentiated, unitary mass but a variety of subject-specific literacies. Disciplines have different views of knowledge, different research practices, and different ways of seeing the world... (Hyland, 2002, p.5).

To highlight the complicated nature of defining academic discourse satisfactorily, I would like to introduce a quotation from one of the departmental lecturers who took part in my study

> **Jack:** Well, I think for me, good academic writing is.....um.....I mean it's the simple things in a way, it's the beginning, middle and end in the sense that.....well that I think is not academic necessarily it's just good writing, where you say what it's all about, then you say what it's all about but you take longer and then.....That's got to be there but what's really there, but what really reflects what I'm looking for is that people know the subject, they've read around it so they know the main arguments and they can actually stitch them together in a way that one paragraph is linked to another, there is a kind of continuum. Now, not everyday writes like that. I mean, I mean, I think gosh that paragraph wasn't linked to that in what I'm doing but basically that's what I'm looking for – that there is a pathway of argument, at there is a development, and that when they get to the end they are basically saying 'This is what I think. This is what it is. (Jack, 06.05.04)[39]

This quotation illustrates the problems surrounding academic writing in many ways. I will develop each of the significant issues that are raised by this quotation below.

[39] Comments from lecturers and students will be analysed in more detail in Part 2.

The first issue to be noted is that the definition is vague, confusing, and slightly contradictory reflecting a general theoretical confusion concerning a definition of good academic writing. Although there are a certain number of discrete elements in the above definition – 'a pathway of argument', 'a development', 'one paragraph is linked to another' etc. – the overall effect of the statement is to leave one with a sense of confusion, a sense of wanting things to be explained more clearly, elaborated upon. This attempt to define a personal view of academic writing seems to symbolize the complicated nature of defining academic writing on a wider level. We must also consider that definitions will change on an institutional, departmental and individual level, where even lecturers within the same department teaching the same course will differ in the opinions of what is acceptable, unacceptable, meritorious or simply average[40].

The second point to be drawn from this quotation, and in direct relation to the first point, is that the lecturer states that 'it's the beginning, middle and end in the sense that.....well that I think is not academic necessarily it's just good writing'. In saying this, the lecturer is assuming an ethnocentric view of writing in claiming that the linear structure of a beginning, middle and end is 'just good writing', whereas this may not be considered the case in other communities and cultures (see Connor 1996). Although it is important to recognize that, 'the way people think, speak, write, and behave is certainly influenced by the culture in which they are brought up, and certain cultural differences indeed exist' (Kubota, 1999, p.15), it is also essential to avoid the pitfalls of cultural determinism or the assumption that there is 'a systematic, culturally determined way in which all members in a certain culture think, behave, and act' (Kubota, 1999, p.14). The field of contrastive rhetoric, defined by Connor (2003) as

[40] It is important to note that this variety of opinion and difference in interpretation occurs even when lecturers are utilizing a set of departmental guidelines which some universities issue to staff

> ...an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers, explaining these problems by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language (Connor, 2003, p.223),

has been criticized for precisely this reason. Contrastive rhetoric originated in the work of Kaplan (1966), who argued that writers have particular views on language which they have learned in their own cultures and which may not be compatible with writing in English. This approach has been criticized on many grounds[41] but particularly because of its use of an essentialized, 'received' notion of culture[42]. In her discussion of the way in which Japanese culture has been constructed by discourses, Kubota highlights the problems inherent with this kind of approach when she says

> On the one hand, researchers often characterize Japanese culture as traditional, homogeneous, and group oriented with a strong emphasis on harmony. They argue that because group goals override individual interests, the Japanese underemphasize self-expression and creativity. On the other hand, researchers characterize U.S. culture and Western culture in general using such labels as *individualism, self-expression,* and *critical thinking.* This conception is reflected in a strong tendency toward cultural dichotomization that has long existed in areas of enquiry such as contrastive rhetoric, in which Japanese written discourse is characterized as indirect, implicit and inductive as opposed to English discourse, which is described as direct and deductive... (Kubota, 1999, p. 12).

Kubota argues that, in this particular approach, 'perceived cultural differences are taken as truth' (Kubota, 1999, p.16) whereas it is more productive to view this type of knowledge as 'neither true, nor scientific, nor neutral but rather as existing discursive relations in which power is circulated, exercised and attached to a particular form of knowledge' (Kubota, 1999,

[41] See Zamel (1997), Scollon (1997), Kubota (1999)
[42] See Atkinson (1999) for a discussion of culture

p.16). In other words, by referring to Foucault's notions of discourse[43] and power/knowledge[44], Kubota emphasizes the fact that particular discourses represent certain things in certain ways, and that the construction of cultural difference is consequently a result of the struggle between more and less powerful discourses. Connor (2003) responds to the charge of essentializing culture leveled at contrastive rhetoric by admitting

> ...future contrastive rhetoric research needs to develop greater sensitivity to the view that sees writers not as parts of separate, identifiable cultural groups but as individuals in social groups that are undergoing continuous change (Connor, 1996, p.234).

In agreement with Kubota (1999), I would argue that for contrastive rhetoric, in particular, and L2 writing researchers and practitioners, in general, it would be more productive to view culture as something that is constructed in discourse rather than as a fixed and discrete entity. This allows us to acknowledge that cultural differences exist, whilst enabling us to challenge the way that these differences are constructed. This allows us to discuss the different cultural perceptions of what constitutes 'good' writing, without resorting to essentializing cultural characteristics of writing and equating different writing styles with different thought patterns, as Kaplan (1966) has been criticized for doing.

The way that certain discourses are privileged is highlighted in the way that certain writing practices are accorded more value than others. In the UK students are trained, through our distinct education system, to value a particular way of writing and so come to view this as the only acceptable format (Lillis, 2001). As I discussed in the introduction, this particular form of literacy has been termed 'essayist literacy' (Lillis, 2001, p.20). Lillis claims that the essay,

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[43] 'Instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word 'discourse', I believe I have in fact added to its meaning: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements' (Foucault, 1972, p.80)

[44] 'Foucault argues for the imbrication of power with knowledge, so that all of the knowledge we have is the result or the effect of power struggles' (Mills, 1997, p.21)

although constructed as such at an institutional level and considered to be the 'default genre' (Womack, 1993), is not a clearly defined genre but 'is really institutionalised shorthand for a particular way of constructing knowledge which has become privileged within the academy' (Lillis, 2001, p.20). Lillis's position is based on the work of researchers such as Scollon and Scollon who discuss essayist literacy as a particular way of knowing which is tied in with ideas of Western rationality (Scollon and Scollon, 1981) and Gee who, in his work, *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (1990), outlines the characteristics of essayist discourse. These are summarized by Lillis as follows

> ...such writing (or talking based on similar practices) is linear, it values a particular type of explicitness, it has one central point, theme, character or event at any one time, it is in the standard version of a language. It is a type of writing which aims to inform rather than entertain. Important relationships are those between sentence and sentence, not between speakers, nor between sentence and speaker. The reader has to constantly monitor grammatical and lexical information and, as such, there is a need for the writer to be explicit about logical implications. There is a fictionalisation of both writer and reader, the reader being an idealisation, 'a rational mind formed by the rational body of knowledge of which the essay is part'. The author is a fiction 'since the process of writing and editing essayist text leads to an effacement of individual and idiosyncratic identity (Lillis, 2001, p.38).

Lillis illustrates that this essayist literacy practice privileges particular social and cultural groups who have access to and have been schooled in its discursive routines, which clearly has implications for second language students who have not undergone the UK schooling system and been indoctrinated into the dominant discourse practices (Lillis, 2001, p.39). Lillis also points out that simply because someone is unfamiliar with a particular privileged literacy practice, 'there is no justification for constructing them as 'illiterate', or by associating use of

this literacy with cognitive development, construing them as intellectually inferior in some way' (Lillis, 2001, p.40). She also points out that essayist literacy is a useful notion in the study of student writing, as it also illustrates that, as a particular social practice, it can serve to exclude particular social groups. In addition, it is useful for clarifying the socio-historical nature of writing. Although it is an extremely valuable concept, Lillis warns against viewing it as a discrete phenomenon, reminding us that we need a framework that acknowledges that such a privileged practice exists but also acknowledges that there are other discourse practices that are constantly present and struggling against each other across different domains (Lillis, 2001, p.41). I would suggest that it is this essayist literacy practice that the lecturer in the above quotation is validating.

The third point I would like to extract from this quotation relates to the lecturer's view on knowledge. He states, 'but what really reflects what I'm looking for is that people know the subject'. I would argue that the lecturer here is assuming a transparent link between knowledge and writing. In other words, the knowledge that the student has can be directly transcribed without being affected by the student's ability to write in an academic style. This is, of course, problematic. As Hyland (1999) states

> ... texts cannot be seen as accurate representations of what the world is like because this representation is always filtered through acts of selection, foregrounding and symbolisation; reality is seen as constructed through processes that are essentially social; involving authority, credibility and disciplinary appeals (Hyland, 1999, p.100).

Students cannot simply put into words an accurate representation of reality as they construct meaning and knowledge through their own particular interpretation of and representation of their experience in writing. The language that is used cannot be detached from the knowledge

that they are presenting, as the two are intertwined; one cannot be divorced from the other. The justification for this can, again, be found in the theories of Foucault. He states

> We must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would have only to decipher. The world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no pre-discursive providence which disposes the world in our favour (Foucault, 1981, p.67).

In other words, we construct our knowledge of our world through language. Moreover, this discursive construction of knowledge is always affected by the dominant discourses in society at a particular moment in time. Mills clarifies this point

> ...for Foucault, all knowledge is determined by a combination of social, institutional and discursive pressures, and theoretical knowledge is no exception. Some of this knowledge will challenge dominant discourses and some will be complicit with them (Mills, 1997, p.33).

The writing that the students produce will be a result of their negotiation between their own personal experiences and discourses and the dominant academic discourse of their chosen discipline. The result will not be a transparent link between what the students know and what they have written, as Jack, the lecturer just cited, suggests, but a written product that reflects the result of a struggle between competing discourses peculiar to the student and the context.

Interestingly, this issue also arises when we consider another common practice in Higher Education of having someone 'proofread' student papers in order to change the language of a student's paper without, allegedly, changing any of the meaning. One of the lecturers in this study, Jack, teaching on the MA in Extensions for Natural Resources, explains how he positively encourages his students to get someone to edit their work.

Jack: So what I do try and encourage them to do is to share their dissertation experience with another student from a completely different part of the world so you tend to be making different mistakes. Or basically just bite the bullet and get somebody to edit, help you edit and I don't mind that. I mean it's their ideas and so on. You know, um, I'm not encouraging people to misbehave and so on but I know, for example, that British students that – I remember one great student I had years ago got a distinction, said, 'My dad did some editing.' Well they've got the access to that haven't they? You know, or grandfather did it, you know, and he was taught grammar the way it should be, you know what I mean? So, but people like him don't have the access to that and so I say if necessary get it and in fact I do say, 'Do it. I don't care what it costs. That's half the battle for you because if you can get it to me in a way in which the English is polished in a way that it isn't at the moment I'm not going to be distracted by it and I'm going to be able to comment and concentrate and comment on what the real thing is is what the dissertation is about (Jack, 06.05.04).

I would argue that this extract also shows that Jack is taking the view that language is not significant in the process of knowledge construction, as he sees language and knowledge as separable from one another. Although it may be argued that the proofreading and correction of minor grammatical surface errors would not be changing the discourse constructed by the student in any considerable way, I would argue that any major editing in the work of L2 writers would be a threat to the discursive construction of the writer's identity. As a consequence, the written assignment can no longer be thought of as the product of that particular writer[45]. From

[45] This issue is an important one for the study of identity and L2 writing. Despite this, it is under-researched. Although , it is not covered by this study, it warrants further investigation.

the evidence we see in the quotation above, Jack does not seem to perceive this as an issue of identity, but as an easy solution to a common problem.

The fourth issue that arises from this quotation is to do with constructing an essay by piecing together material from sources. Students are told throughout their academic careers at UK universities that it is not enough to simply piece together source material, but the lecturer here says that he wants to see that 'they've read around it so they know the main arguments and they can actually stitch them together'. Unfortunately, the way the lecturer has chosen to describe the method of putting ideas together can be read in more than one way. The idea of stitching together information could also be misunderstood to mean simply patching together source material to produce a whole document; a practice that is clearly commonplace amongst second language students with either poor language ability, lack of confidence in their language abilities , or little understanding of the conventions of academic discourse required of them. Although it is clear from further discussion with this lecturer that he is in no way advocating this kind of practice, the fact remains that the terminology that he has used here in his description of 'good academic writing' could be problematic for students and lead to further misunderstanding surrounding this issue. This extract from another lecturer, Andy, reveals the way in which this kind of 'stitching together' can reveal itself in student writing.

Andy: She is answering the question, she knows what she is doing. This is the thing, this is the frustrating thing that you get, that she know's what she's doing, she knows what she wants to say but in a sense she hasn't got the confidence to say it herself. And in Sally, it's more impressive, maybe it's a cultural thing, it's more impressive if you quote people who are saying it in good English so that it gives it that professional air because it's written in the words of professional economists etc. so

therefore you read it and it looks like a professional economist has written it – well it has, they have, because that's where it's come from.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Andy: But it's not, it's not using, it's none of herself in it which is...

Interviewer: She just hasn't got the confidence to step into the arena and...

Andy: No, no. It is rare for them to do that. As I say the problem is that sometimes when they do that it actually becomes almost unreadable but I kind of think well that's OK, I'll work through this because, you know, this guy or whatever has tried to do it himself and that's....all credit (Andy, 25.02.04).

In this extract, Andy is discussing an essay that has been submitted to him where the student[46] has worked through the essay by piecing together several sections of source material without contributing any commentary of her own. This, of course, is considered plagiarism according to institutional definitions. However, I would like to argue that this is not a case of straightforward plagiarism but an instance of 'patchwriting' (see Pecorari, 2003), a developmental stage in writing where the students rely too heavily on source material as a way of initiating themselves into the kind of academic writing expected of them[47].

The final point that is neatly illustrated in the quotation from Jack, is the idea that the students, as new members of the academic community, are expected to perform in one way whereas older, more established members of the community are given more freedom to play with the

[46] In this case Sally. See p.94 for a full introduction to the student participants who took part in this study. Note that all names have been anonymysed.

[47] This issue will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6: Avoiding Academic Idenity: Patchwriting and the invisible writer, p.140.

academic conventions of the establishment. This lecturer highlights this difference when comparing what he expects from student writers and what he himself does. He says

> ...that one paragraph is linked to another, there is a kind of continuum. Now, not everyday writes like that. I mean, I mean, I think gosh that paragraph wasn't linked to that in what I'm doing but basically that's what I'm looking for...(Jack, 06.05.04).

I think the crucial statement here is 'not everybody writes like that'. However, although it is the case that not everybody writes in this way, the lecturer still expects everyone to conform to these essayist discourse traits at least, presumably, until they are considered to have enough 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984)[48] of their own to be able to flout the rules. This perspective is summarized by Santos (2001),

> Among the assumptions of higher education are that students will be socialized into the norms of both general academic English and the discourse conventions of their particular fields, and that teachers will help them in this process. Only when students have attained a sufficient level of proficiency in academic discourse will they be in a position to challenge academic standards and approaches to knowledge, should they wish to do so (Santos, 2001, p. 184).

This perspective is problematic in that Santos (2001) is advocating an approach to teaching writing which firstly, assumes that there are distinct and classifiable 'norms' of academic English; secondly, it assumes that teachers will socialize their students into their particular discourse community; and finally, that there is a clear step from being an apprentice to being an 'expert' who has the right to challenge academic standards. In answer to Santos's (2001)

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[48] 'the definition of capital is very wide for Bourdieu and includes material things (which can have symbolic value), as well as 'untouchable' but culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority (referred to as symbolic capital), along with cultural capital (defined as culturally-valued taste and consumption patterns)...For Bourdieu, capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange, and the term is extended 'to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation' (Harker et al. 1990, p.1 cited in Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002, p.22). The possession of cultural capital within a particular field affords the person a certain amount of power. Significantly, once the person is in a position of power they are also able to determine what constitutes cultural capital.

first point, it is important to remember that academic English is not a fixed entity and the 'norms' that are mentioned are always contested. Lillis (2001) reminds us

> ...that dominant practices and conventions, whilst powerful, are not fixed, but rather they are the result of hegemonic struggle at any one moment in time, the struggle is between, and across, alliances of social groups around maintaining or contesting dominant orders of discourse (Lillis, 2001, p.37).

Santos's (2001) second point appears to be an idealized version of what the education system should be doing and evidence from this study shows that teachers may not have enough time to be able to efficiently socialize their students into their academic discourse communities[49].

From the discussion that has resulted from the quotation from Jack[50] on academic writing, it is clear that there are many complicated issues surrounding the topic. As the students who took part in this are introduced to academic writing and have to make the transition into their chosen disciplinary fields via a course in English for Academic Purposes, it is necessary to look at this particular field in more detail. The next section will consider a definition of English for Academic Purposes before progressing to a critical discussion of the problems inherent in the field.

[49] See Chapters 5, 6 and 7for a fuller discussion of this issue
[50] See p.49

Chapter 3

English for Academic Purposes: Integrating the Individual into the Institution

3.1 A brief description of EAP

In Volume 1 of the first journal specifically dealing with the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes,* the editors Hamp-Lyons and Hyland provide a detailed definition of what they consider EAP to be.

> English for Academic Purposes refers to language research and instruction that focuses on the specific communicative needs and practices of particular groups in academic contexts. It means grounding instruction in an understanding of the cognitive, social and linguistic demands of specific academic disciplines. This takes practitioners beyond preparing learners for study in English to developing new kinds of literacy: equipping students with communicative skills to participate in particular academic and cultural contexts (Hamp-Lyons & Hyland, 2002, p.2).

Hamp-Lyons and Hyland's (2002) definition of EAP, I would argue, reflects an idea of the way the field of EAP would like to be seen, rather than portraying a realistic description of the way that EAP functions in many institutional contexts. This definition stresses the fact that EAP practitioners go 'beyond preparing learners for study in English to developing new kinds of literacy' (Hamp-Lyons & Hyland, 2002, p.2) and ground instruction 'in an understanding of the cognitive, social and linguistic demands of specific academic disciplines' (Hamp-Lyons & Hyland, 2002, p.2). However, this study shows that EAP practitioners may be unaware of the specific social and linguistic demands of the target disciplines and this may affect the

preparation that students receive before entering their disciplines[51]. I would now like to consider further criticisms of the field of EAP.

3.2 Criticising EAP

One of the most significant criticisms of mainstream EAP is its refusal to engage with its own status as a political activity or, in other words, its determination to be seen as a pragmatic enterprise[52]. For many students, the transition into the academic discourse community they have chosen to become a part of is a difficult and confusing process. Although academic discourse is not a fixed entity, L2 students are faced with an institutional concept of academic discourse that is resistant to change or difference. Students may feel that the language of the academic community does not reflect their own individual identity and feel that they either have to surrender their own identity, in order to become accepted or they choose to flout the conventions of traditional academic discourse, in order to preserve the identity that they feel is a crucial part of their work as an academic. Despite the obvious cultural and political issues surrounding this process of entering the community, EAP, in general, continues to present itself as divorced from these problems and therefore does not adequately prepare students for the political struggle they may have in situating their identities within their chosen discipline.

The first major criticism of the field of English for Academic Purposes is to do with the problematic notions of 'academic discourse community' and 'academic discourse'. In general, EAP has worked with the concept of an academic discourse community as a 'homogeneous circle, unified by its distinctive discourse features' (Canagarajah, 2002, p.32), and academic discourse has been seen as a 'unified register' although it has not been systematically

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[51] See p.133 for a fuller discussion

[52] See Benesch (2001). 'Although EAP attends to the social construction of knowledge, it has, for the most part, overlooked sociopolitical issues affecting life in and outside of academic settings' (p.xv). In this case, pragmatic denotes the practical rather than the idealistic.

investigated or researched (Bhatia, 2002). Academic discourse has been treated as a discrete set of common core skills that are applicable across disciplines. There is, however, a large body of research that highlights the fact that there is no such thing as one 'academic discourse' but an assortment of academic discourses which can be interpreted according to particular values and beliefs and can vary from institution to institution, department to department, and even from supervisor to supervisor within departments (Candlin and Plum 1999, Hyland 1999, Johns 1997, Lea and Street 1998). With so much research clearly showing the wide variation of academic discourses across disciplines, it is now almost impossible for EAP to present a concept of a unified, cross-disciplinary academic discourse. Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, in their overview of the current state of EAP, call for EAP practitioners to build on this research and challenge old assumptions (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002). They point out that a belief in a universality of academic conventions misleads students into believing that success is based upon mastering a set of 'transferable rules' (p.6) and that this is of course a dangerous misconception for students, as they then see their EAP course as providing them with all the skills they need for academic success. In other words, if they can learn the set of skills presented on the EAP course, they will then have the 'key' to the academic community. This inevitably leads to frustration in the student, when they encounter problems with their supervisor or their tutors, as they may not be able to understand why they are facing difficulties and why their supervisors may not be satisfied with the writing they are submitting.

Classifying academic discourse as a set of discrete skills leads to other problems. Firstly, those who assume that academic literacy practices can be broken down into a set of atomized skills are also assuming that if a student does not utilize these skills to communicate effectively that this is the fault of the student. They convince themselves that this is a weakness in the learner

rather than in the existing pedagogy. Secondly, and in direct relation to the first point, as Canagarajah points out

> ...to treat each use of deviation from academic discourse as a sign of unproficiency or failure is to underestimate the agency of the students
>
> (2002, p.33)

In other words, the attitude that academic discourse rules are a discrete set of skills, combined with the stance of a discourse community that is resistant to change from its newer members, prescribes that students should write in a particular fashion, although it is not always clear to the student what this should be (see Clark, 1992, Lea and Street 1998, Lillis 2001). When a student, particularly a second language student, chooses to appropriate the skills and use them in a different way, this is all too often regarded as a deficiency on the student's part. It is easier and less challenging for the instructor to categorize the student as one who has not properly mastered the required skills, than to deal with a student who has decided to resist institutionalized practices and use the discourse to represent their varying identities in a way that still fulfills the demands of good academic discourse practice.

This brings us to the second major criticism of the field of EAP and this relates to its pragmatic[53] nature and its failure to challenge established institutional practices. Canagarajah (2002) regards EAP as adopting a 'normative attitude that the discourses of academic communities are not open to negotiation or criticism' (p.32) and Benesch (2001) emphasises the fact that the politics of EAP remain largely 'hidden' and that 'power issues have been ignored in the name of pragmatism (p.3).The main point to be gleaned from these criticisms is that teachers of EAP tend to teach their subject as if it is detached from any political or

[53] See Benesch (2001)

ideological position. They do not acknowledge that there are institutional powers at force behind the work they do in the classroom. Gee (1994) states that

> Like it or not, English teachers stand at the very heart of the most crucial educational, cultural, and political issues of our time (Gee, 1994, p.190).

In other words, as teachers are responsible for introducing students to new discourses or 'cultural models'[54], they are responsible for changing students perspectives and introducing new possibilities. This will always be, according to Gee (1996), 'ultimately a moral act' (p.89). It is essential that English teachers recognise the importance of these educational, cultural and political issues as they simply cannot be separated from the context of the English language classroom. As Pennycook says in his call for a 'Critical Applied Linguistics' (2001)

> ...we need to understand the classroom itself as a social domain, not merely a reflection of the larger society beyond the classroom walls but also as a place in which social relations are played out and therefore a context in which we need to directly address questions of social power (p.138).

Pennycook is emphasizing the fact that social relations are *produced* as well as reflected in the context of the classroom and therefore the teacher, as Gee (1994) declares, has to acknowledge and accept the role that they are playing and the fact that the classroom is not a space free from ideological influence and relations of power. Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) admit that the field of EAP has yet to seriously confront these issues (p.10) and that although there is a greater awareness of the way that institutional power structures are at work, this has not necessarily led to any further action to deal with it.

[54] 'Cultural models carry with them values and perspectives on people and on reality. Cultural models from different sociocultural groups can conflict in their content, in how they are used, and in the values and perspectives they carry (Gee, 1996, p.88).

Critics of this pragmatic approach feel that, not only is this refusal to acknowledge relations of power denying a basic reality, but it is also placing the students at a disadvantage. It leads to a situation where students are so occupied with learning 'information' that they do not have the opportunity to tackle larger questions of power and simply reproduce conventional discourses. As a result of this, 'they will simply receive practice in using the established knowledge and conventions in the expected way' (Canagarajah, 2002).

For some, this may seem to be a satisfactory result. One particular writer who believes strongly in the pragmatic approach, Santos (2001), with reference to Critical Linguists, states,

> I find myself not only in disagreement with both the theoretical positions and pedagogical recommendations they espouse, but in closer embrace of pragmatism, vulgar or otherwise, as a far more satisfying approach to TESOL, EAP and L2 writing, and for that matter, everyday life (Santos, 2001, p.180).

He goes on to say that he does not see anything wrong with students accommodating to dominant practices, as he sees this as a successful transition into the academic community. For Santos, this is the desired result (Santos, 2001, p. 183). Santos claims that the argument that language teaching always has a political dimension is based on a faulty argument. He claims that, even if complete neutrality is impossible, it is possible to approximate neutrality and therefore adhere to a pragmatic approach. He defends this argument by saying,

> For example, if I find myself caught in a country where war suddenly breaks out between two regions, and a third region declares its neutrality, my reaction will not be that I might as well stay in one of the warring regions because neutrality is a myth; my reaction will be to go there (Santos, 2001, p.181).

I would argue, however, that this argument is unsound. Santos's hypothetical decision to go to the country is not a neutral decision. It is an ideological choice that is politically motivated. To

continue with his analogy, if he were to choose to leave one of the warring countries, he is making a choice to leave the position he is in, to leave the people of the country who are affected by the war, to refuse to help or be involved and abandon the situation. Although the example may be slightly laboured, I believe that it illustrates the fact that this decision would not be based on neutrality but would be politically motivated.

Therefore, although some, like Santos (2001) would advocate an accommodationist approach, for many it is very far from what they would conceive the purpose of academic study to be. If the university is a place of learning, discussion and debate, discovery and innovation, then surely it is undesirable to assimilate students into an established way of thinking and a single, formalised way of producing knowledge. If the university is truly a site of discussion and debate, discovery and invention, then EAP must face up to its responsibilities and acknowledge the way that power works within the institution and proponents of this view should be more than simply 'voices on the margins' (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p.10).

3.3 Moving towards a critical EAP

As stated above, the refusal of traditional EAP to recognise its political nature and to make students aware of the way that power and knowledge are at work within the discourses of the institution restricts the creative potential of the second language writer. When presented with only one viable option, students may feel they have no choice but to conform to it or risk being refused entry into the academic discourse community. Students therefore often find it simpler to follow the path that they are shown, rather than try to create an alternative path, as Canagarajah states

> The usual temptation for subjects is to accommodate to preconstructed, legitimized, univocal discourses. These institutional discourses offer a readymade and convenient

> way to solve communicative challenges. However, to use these institutionalized uncritically is to let oneself be represented by the conventions and ideologies of each discourse. It is to be cast in the subject positions and roles preordained for speakers by the respective discourses (Canagarajah, 2001, p.128).

The danger in this situation is readily apparent. To conform completely to the dominant discourse conventions of the academic discourse community requires the subject to produce a certain kind of knowledge in a certain way. It does not allow space for representing alternative social, cultural and political identities or presenting alternative types of knowledge[55].

In an attempt to move away from the traditional pragmatic approach that advocates such unquestioning assimilation, many people working in the field of EAP have drawn on the fields of Critical Linguistics, Critical Language Awareness (CLA), and Critical Discourse analysis (CDA) in an attempt to find a pedagogical approach that raises students' awareness of the political nature of the context they are in. Romy Clark, for example, writes of her experience of introducing the principles of CLA into her Study Skills programme at a university in the UK (Clark, 1992). She believes that when teaching academic writing, it is crucial to 'critically explore with the students the notion of academic discourse community and how it is that certain forms of knowledge and ways of telling that knowledge have evolved in the way that they have' (p.118) and secondly, that it is vital to develop ways of 'challenging some of the discourse practices and of producing alternatives which allow the excluded values and experiences to shape alternatives' (p.118). These two strategies incorporate the most important tenets of this kind of critical work, the notions of *empowerment* and *emancipation,* which Clark defines respectively as 'the process by which students become aware of what the conventions are, where they come from, what their likely effects are and how they feel about them' (p.118)

[55] See Pennycook (2001) and Foucault (1980)

and 'using power gained through awareness to act' (p.119). For Clark, then, the objective is to raise students' awareness of the fact that the academic discourse conventions are conventions that have been enforced by the people who hold the most power within the academic discourse community and that these conventions can be questioned and challenged[56]. It is important, however, that the decision to challenge is made by the student; that once they are aware of the way that power works, they can choose to conform or resist. This is not something that is prescribed by the teacher as this would, as Clark points out, be replacing one kind of prescriptivism for another (1992, p.135).

However, I would like to focus here on what appears to be a problem with this approach. In order to introduce the problem I am using the example presented by Clark of one of her students who challenged his lecturer's explicit ideas on "proper" academic conventions (Clark, 1992, p.120). Clark describes the situation of a mature, postgraduate student who, after receiving feedback from his instructor complaining about the subjective nature of one of his assignments, felt empowered by the discussion with his instructor to go and challenge his lecturer and assert his right to use personal expressions in his writing. The student's awareness of the nature of 'objectivity' as a dominant discourse convention that can be challenged and questioned gave him the confidence to approach his lecturer to discuss the issue and 'insist' on his rights. We are told that this was a 'successful outcome' (p.120).

Although this may be interpreted as being a successful outcome, I would argue that there is not enough information presented here to establish the outcome. I would also like to argue that this example points to a shortcoming in this type of critical approach. What we are told in

[56] Although it is the most powerful members of the community that can determine the academic conventions, it is important to understand that these conventions are reproduced and reinforced by the community at large. It is also important to remember that it is also possible to resist these dominant conventions

Clark's example is that the student approached the lecturer, discussed the issue further and insisted on using the personal, subjective language that he felt he had the right to use. What we are not told is what the reaction of the lecturer was and this is where the problem lies. The example suggests two possibilities: that the instructor simply conceded that the student was right and allowed him to use the language that he felt comfortable with or that he discussed the student's concerns but insisted on the traditional academic conventions that he believed to be important and the student then insisted on doing it his own way. The first of these options seems unlikely as the lecturer would have been unlikely to give such critical feedback of the student's style if they had not been convinced of the necessity of a strict adhesion to the conventions as they perceived them to be. The second option is also problematic as it seems that the student was satisfied with the outcome but we have no evidence of how the lecturer felt about the decision. It would be interesting to know how the lecturer assessed subsequent work from the student and whether further conflicts arose.

I think this small encounter reveals a larger concern and that is what could be seen to be a 'wall' that can exist between the English language classroom and the departmental courses that the students enter. If we think about this on a micro level, an English language teacher may be very successful in introducing their students to the idea of dominant discourse conventions and the way that power works to privilege the knowledge and writing of certain groups. The students may be successful in producing academic writing that challenges the dominant discourse conventions and provides them with a feeling of individual empowerment. The English language teacher may be satisfied with the academic writing that the students are producing but we have to remember that this is a 'sheltered' environment. The participants in this scenario have the same purpose in mind; both teacher and student are aware of the cultural politics of the writing situation and are working towards producing academic discourse

that allows the student to enter the academic community without compromising their particular social, cultural and political identities. In a situation like this, as in the example from Clark (1992) above, we can see that the student feels prepared to tackle political problems once they enter their department. The problem occurs when the student leaves the supportive environment of the English language classroom and enters their discipline. If their lecturer or supervisor in the department is not prepared to accept academic writing that differs from their own conception of what academic writing should be, the student will not find the same support to enable them to develop their particular style in the way they might wish.

Much has been written in the field of L2 writing research highlighting the fact that those in the role of gatekeepers and assessors are not always aware or sensitive to the cultural needs of L2 writers [57]. In his article 'Addressing issues of power and difference in ESL academic writing.' Canagarajah points out that, although second language writing teachers are

> not unaware of the conflicts of power inequalities and cultural difference involved in language acquisition...they do not have at their disposal the methods and approaches which would enable them to teach writing with a sensitivity to such concerns (2001, p.117).

If this is the situation for L2 writing teachers who are constantly dealing with these cultural and political issues at some level on a daily basis, then the problem is surely multiplied for departmental lecturers who may not have any familiarity with L2 writing issues or any perception that such conflicts even exist. For a student who has experienced an English language course that has encouraged a critical approach to written academic discourse, meeting a lecturer or supervisor who is insensitive to the cultural politics of writing will be frustrating and demoralising. It is this situation that I have described as the 'wall' i.e. any attempts to resist

[57] See Canagarajah (2001), Harklau (1999).

assimilation into prescribed notions of academic discourses and any attempts to produce discourse that is seen by the lecturer/supervisor to deviate from the norm are blocked. In this situation, the problem lies with the fact that the lecturer/supervisor is unaware or underprepared for dealing with the cultural politics of second language writing but unfortunately the difficulty of overcoming this always lies with the students. It is here that the problem of these mainstream critical approaches to English teaching lies. It seems that the students are led to believe that their awareness will lead to emancipation through action but what happens when their action is not accepted?[58]

We have seen that the field of traditional EAP can be criticised on several grounds. It is too often guilty of viewing academic discourse as consisting of a discrete number of skills that, once learned, provide the student with access to the academic community. In addition to this, it also has a problematic view of the academic discourse community itself and sees it as 'homogeneous' and 'unconflictual' (Starfield, 2001, p.132). The second criticism that I have considered is the lack of commitment to dealing with issues of power or the 'assumption that students should accommodate themselves to the demands of academic assignments, behaviors expected in academic classes, and hierarchical arrangements within academic institutions' (Benesch, 2001, p.41). It is clear that this refusal to deal with the political nature of English language teaching is unsatisfactory and disadvantageous for students. Students should be aware of the way that power works within the university, so that they are in a position to negotiate a position for themselves within the academic discourse community. However, it has also been pointed out in this section that the 'emancipatory modernist' approach, although working towards desirable ends, can also be criticised for what can be seen as its patronizing nature, an over-reliance on a neo-marxist framework that privileges economic power over any other kind

[58] This refers back to my discussion of Pennycook on p.20

of power and, possibly more importantly, an over-optimistic view of its own emancipatory powers.

I have argued, using an example of a study from Clark, that even when students are made aware of the dominant discursive practices of the academic community and are prepared to engage with them, that the process can still be complicated as there can often be a 'wall' blocking their attempts to renegotiate their academic identities. I have described this wall as being created by those lecturers and supervisors who continue to subscribe to the view that there is a fixed set of academic conventions that make up 'acceptable' academic discourse and that if students wish to enter the academic community 'membership is contingent on students surrendering their discourse to that of the experts' (Benesch, 2001, p.89). Even though students are aware of the way that power works and understand the fact that academic discourse conventions are only conventions, it may still be impossible for them to appropriate the discourse to represent their own cultural, political, and individual identities, because of firm resistance from these particular lecturers and supervisors.

To conclude this section, I will again turn to Pennycook who argues that

> ...on the one hand we need to help our students gain access to those forms of language and culture that matter while on the other we need to help challenge those norms. On the one hand we need to help our students develop critical awareness of academic norms and practices, while on the other we need to understand and promote culturally diverse ways of thinking, working and writing (1997b, p.265 cited in Swales, 2001, p.53).

Although Pennycook is referring to English language teachers here, it seems that the need to 'promote culturally diverse ways of thinking, working and writing' is something that we should

not only be concentrating on with our students but also with lecturers and supervisors within the disciplines who are working with second language students. A closer relationship between EAP classes and courses and the departments that the students will enter, a relationship that explores issues of power, access, cultural and political identities, may contribute towards breaking down the 'wall' that prevents so many second language writers from establishing their academic identity in a way that is fulfilling for them.

Chapter 4

The Study

4.1 The institutional context

This study was carried out over a period of around ten months, beginning in July 2003. The university that is focused upon in the study was chosen for several reasons: the presence of a Pre-sessional English course with a good reputation, the researcher's proximity to the University, the researcher's familiarity with the staff and structure of the Pre-sessional course, and the willingness of the staff and students to take part in the study. I have chosen to preserve the anonymity of the institution involved, as I do not believe that identifying the university would have any positive bearing on the study. I also believe that the data gathered here would be fairly representative of situations across the UK, although further research would of course be needed to verify this. I do believe, however, that a certain amount of background information about the university would help us to create a contextual basis to aid in our interpretation of the case study data.

The university is included in the top 20 most research-intensive universities in the UK and is recognized for its teaching across a broad range of Arts, Humanities and Sciences programmes. The University offers taught degree programmes in more than 60 subjects, and in excess of 250 part-time adult education (public) courses. In the 2001 RAE, fifteen departments were awarded an RAE rating of 5, and five departments were designated 5*, demonstrating the University's international research strength in areas such as Environmental Science, Psychology, English, Archaeology, Modern Languages, Agriculture, Plant Sciences, Food Science, Business, Town Planning, the Built Environment, Law, Applied Mathematics

and Electrical Engineering. Nearly 60% of academic staff are in departments rated 5 and above[59]. The university has a student population of more than 15,000, and a staff of 4,000.

In 2003-04, the time that the study was carried out, there was a total of 14,887 students at the university and 4,503 postgraduate students. 1878 of these postgraduate students came from outside of the EU and represented 111 countries. The top five countries represented were China, the USA, Nigeria, Taiwan and India.

The students who were selected to take part in this study were chosen from the university's Pre-sessional course. The Pre-sessional course offers intensive English for academic study courses to international students who wish to gain admission to University degree programmes in the UK. This Pre-sessional course has been providing courses for over thirty years. In 2003-2004 there were 90 students enrolled on the course from 8 different countries. There were 39 students from China, 25 from Taiwan, 10 from Thailand, 9 from Japan, 3 from Saudi Arabia, 2 from Spain, 1 from Korea and 1 from Hong Kong.

4.2 The participants

The study involved semi-formal interviews[60] with three groups of participants; a group of international postgraduate students, a group of Pre-sessional lecturers, and a group of departmental lecturers. These particular groups of participants were selected in order to give a variety of perspectives on the issues surrounding L2 writing at university level. It was important, in designing this study, to provide a space for the students' voices to be heard in

[59] The factual information presented here has been taken from the University's website and from discussion with the university's Information Services Directorate. It has not been referenced or included in the bibliography to preserve the anonymity of the university.

[60] See section 4.4.1, p.87, for a discussion of why this format was chosen

order for them to contribute towards the presentation and discussion of the issues that directly affect them[61]. As one of the main aims of this study is to observe the ways in which the Pre-sessional English course does or does not prepare international postgraduate students for study in their chosen departments, it was essential to interview both Pre-sessional and departmental lecturers. The similarities and differences in the opinions, pedagogical approaches, attitudes to academic writing and methods of feedback between these two groups of participants provides invaluable data for this study. In addition to this, both Pre-sessional lecturers and departmental lecturers were selected in order to give a longitudinal aspect to the research. As I was following the students through a certain section of their academic career, it was also essential to reflect the changes in teaching and supervisory arrangements.

In organising the study, the first step was to approach the administration of the Pre-sessional course, in order to decide how to find a group of students who would volunteer to take part in the study. Due to the nature of the Pre-sessional course itself, it was impossible to have access to any data on the students, until they arrived to begin the course. Once the students arrived, they were divided into their class groups by the course administrators. Each student takes one Writing Class, one Speaking and Listening Class, and one Project Class. The administrators try to ensure that the students will have a different lecturer for each class, although it is sometimes the case that some students may have the same teacher for Writing and Project or for Speaking and Listening and Project.

[61] For a discussion of the need for research driven by and presenting the voices of the students themselves see Section 4.3, p.83 and Leki 2001

In collaboration with the course administration, it was decided that the best way to approach the students would be to attend one of their classes and ask for volunteers [62]. I decided to attend the Project Class to request volunteers[63]. The Project Class is designed to introduce students to the idea of completing a research paper. They work on: documentation styles, writing abstracts, incorporating sources, paraphrasing and summarizing and produce two mini-research papers, one shorter and one slightly longer. The topic for the first paper is determined by the course materials and all students write on the same topic. The second paper is for the students to choose their own topic related to their field of study. The students are also asked to present their second project in the form of an oral presentation. As well as class study time, the students have regular tutorials with their course teacher. The final important note to make about the Project Class is that the students are assigned into class groups according to their field of study. This means there may be a group of Business students, a group of Finance students, etc. but there is also very often one mixed group made up of those students who are the only ones studying their particular course.

After narrowing down the possible research settings to Project Classes with teachers who were not teaching the course for the first time, I sought permission from the class teacher and then entered the Project Classes to explain to the students the aims of the study and ask for volunteers. While talking to the Project Classes to ask for volunteers I attempted to be very controlled about the amount of information I was giving them concerning the research topic[64].

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[62] It was requested that the researcher did not ask for volunteers from classes where the Pre-sessional lecturer was teaching for the first time, as the course itself is very demanding and requires a great deal of preparation and grading time in addition to the 24 hour per week teaching load. It was felt that taking part in the study would be an extra pressure on these lecturers.

[63] Due to pressures of time for the students and Pre-sesional lecturers it would have been impossible to track the students' experience through all of their Pre-sessional classes so the one that was most relevant was selected.

[64] Talking about interviewing in qualitative research McCracken (1988) states, '...the investigator must be careful to establish a relationship of substance, and some kind of "connection" with the respondent...But it is possible to go too far and allow the intimacy to obscure or complicate the task at hand. The most obvious

I did not want to prejudice their decisions in any way by giving too specific information about my topic of research. Essentially, I told the students that I was a PhD student researching academic writing in a second language and that I would be interested in following some students through a part of their university course, in order to talk about their experiences of academic writing at a university in the UK. I also mentioned that there would be potential benefits for the students in that this would provide an opportunity for spoken English practice outside of the classroom situation. From my own experience of teaching on this course, I was aware that the students often complained that they did not have sufficient opportunity to practice their spoken English in different social situations. After this brief presentation I left the class. A sign-up sheet was left in the classroom and collected from the class teacher after the class.

Once the volunteer lists had been collected, the students' names were cross-matched with the students' administrative data[65]. I was interested in the students' nationality, chosen course of study, age and gender. In order to gain a more general picture of the students' experience, I wanted to ensure that the volunteers were representative of as wide a spectrum of nationalities as possible. It should be noted, however, that the majority of students attending the Pre-sessional course in 2003 were Chinese speakers, reflecting a nationwide trend for recruitment from China.

In total, 25 students volunteered to take part in the project. From this pool of 25, I chose 6 students to follow as case studies from the beginning of the Pre-sessional course to the end of

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danger is that the respondent who is given the terms and objectives of research is not likely to give fully spontaneous and unstudied responses. The respondent may prove overhelpful, and try to "serve up" what he or she thinks is wanted' (p.27). In order to avoid this situation, I was careful to avoid being too specific about my research aims.

[65] This was done with the students' permission

the first semester in their department. The final choice of students was determined by several factors. The first was that the students had to be spread as equally as possible across the Project Class groups. As I would also be interviewing the Pre-sessional lecturers at regular intervals during the course, it was important to consider their work load and the amount of time they could give to the study. From a total of four Pre-sessional lecturers, two of them had two students chosen from their class and the remaining two had only one. The next factor to be considered was gender. As far as possible, I wanted to have an equal balance of male and female participants. As there were far fewer male volunteers than female, it was considered important to start by selecting the male volunteers who fulfilled my requirement of studying on different courses and being of different nationalities. After selecting the three male participants, I chose three female participants from different project classes, different nationalities and different courses of study. If there were more than one suitable candidate I used age as a factor to aid the selection process. The older students were chosen, as it was felt that they would have more experience of academic and professional writing in their own language, as well as possibly in English.

Due to the nature of the selection process of the student volunteers, the selection of the Pre-sessional lecturers who would take part in the study was not entirely random. After selecting the students, I contacted the lecturers to confirm that they would be willing to take part in the study and provided them with further details of what would be involved (see Appendix 1: Pre-sessional Teacher Information Sheet).

As far as the third group of participants, the Departmental Lecturers, was concerned, I contacted the Heads of the relevant departments before the beginning of the autumn term to ask permission for the study to take place and to request the names of any of the students'

course teachers who might be willing to take part in the study. All but one of the Heads responded agreeing to the study taking place and providing specific names of lecturers who would be pleased to take part. I then contacted these lecturers individually and explained the study and what would be required of them as participants (see Appendix 2: Departmental lecturer Information Sheet).

Table 1 below provides a summary of the participants who were selected or agreed to take part and indicates their relationships to each other.

Table 2: Participants

STUDENT NAME	COURSE	PRE-SESSIONAL LECTURER NAME	DEPARTMENTAL LECTURER NAME
Yu-Fen	MA TEFL	Fay	Mary
Tetsuya	MSc in Applied Development Studies	Ian	Kieron
Aran	MA Extensions for Natural Resources	Ian	Jack
Sally	MSc Emerging Markets	**X**	Andy
Sunee	MA Marketing	Leo	**X**
Luis	MA Economics	**X**	**X**

Note 1: The names of the participants have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Note2: X signifies that no-one was available for interview or that the student had withdrawn from the project by this point.

Now that it is clear how the participants to be involved in the case studies were selected I would like to elaborate upon why I chose case studies as the preferred form of data collection for this study.

4.3 Why case studies?

The most useful form of data collection for this study is the case study. Case studies developed from a naturalistic research paradigm and can be seen as having four defining characteristics (Merriam, 1988). Case studies are *particularistic,* in that they focus on one specific phenomenon, group, person or event; they are *descriptive,* in that the end product is a 'thick description'[66] of the phenomenon under study; they are *heuristic,* in that they provide new information or 'illuminate the readers' understanding of the problem' (Merriem, 1988, p.11); and they are *inductive,* in that generalizations, ideas or concepts emerge from the data rather than being imposed from the top down (Merriem, 1988, p.11).The case study allows us to examine the experience of non-native postgraduate students from a variety of perspectives. In his article 'Academic literacy and the nonnative speaker graduate student', Braine (2002) is firm in claiming that research in this area *'must'* be in the form of case studies. He goes on to explain that,

> Case studies provide rich information about learners, about the strategies they use to communicate and learn, how their own personalities, attitudes, and goals interact with the learning environment, and the nature of their linguistic growth. Case studies are also descriptive, dynamic, and rely upon naturally occurring data... (Braine, 2002, p.66).

Although the need for such studies is apparent, there appears to be a noticeable lack of research which focuses on data reflecting the students' experiences from the students' perspectives. In 'Hearing voices: L2 students' experiences in L2 writing courses' Leki (2001) discusses this precise issue. The article is based around Leki's attempts to review literature which dealt with L2 student writing from the students' perspective. She wanted to,

[66] This refers to Geertz' definition of thick description. See Geertz (1973). Also see p. 22 for a description.

> ...find research studies that used in-depth case study, longitudinal, multiple interview, and/or observational methods focused on L2 students with names who would tell us in their own voices what happened to them for better or worse in L2 writing classes (Leki, 2001, p.17).

Although Leki finds abundant research on L2 writing, she claims she is 'struck by the fact that so many of these studies talked about the students but never gave evidence that the researchers spent any time talking to the students' (Leki, 2001, p.18). My own study is an attempt to address this lack of case study-based research. It is essential to provide genuine data from L2 students, in order to gain any real understanding and clarification of the problems they face. Although there are examples of research based on student case studies (see Pecorari 2003; Cotton 2004), it is clear that the field would benefit from more such studies. It is therefore essential to provide more case studies which illustrate the students' perspectives and positions.

Strong support for case studies is also provided by Ivanic (1999) who argues that,

> What research of this sort loses in terms of the power of numbers, it gains and surpasses in other ways. Its power lies in revealing the richness and complexity of the phenomenon under investigation (Ivanic, 1999, p.173).

In my study, as in Ivanic's study described in 'Researching the writer-reader relationship' (Ivanic and Weldon, 1999), the emphasis is not on testing 'an isolated hypothesis' (p.173) but on trying to gain understandings through the analysis of individual experience and therefore the case study is much more relevant. Ivanic makes an important point in the article about the value of case studies that is important for this study and that is that case studies and understandings drawn from this type of data 'are also in harmony with the principles of integrating research and practice' (Ivanic and Weldon, 1999, p.173). As discussed in the

introduction, the emphasis on integrating research and practice is an essential part of taking a critical stance towards linguistic research (see Pennycook 2001)[67].

Although there is a clear need for case studies, we have to be aware that there are certain criticisms leveled at the case study format and these criticisms could also be considered relevant limitations of my own study. One major criticism that can be leveled at case study research is that many case studies cover a very short time period. Although it is fair to say that the case studies I have undertaken in this study are of a very limited time period, it is important to remember that the Pre-sessional course itself is a very intensive course and to complete a genuine case study entails studying the participants and their culture as it really is[68]. The short and intensive nature of the case study accurately reflects the short and intensive nature of the course itself. The length of the case studies, then, was determined by the confines of time and availability of the students. Essentially, they were carried out over a period of six to eight months; from the beginning of the students' Pre-sessional English course to the beginning or middle of their second term in their year of study in their chosen departments. Braine (2002, p.63) reminds us that the student will have developed, and will go on to develop their academic literacy and academic identity long before and long after the period of time covered by the case study. We must therefore always be aware whilst discussing the findings of this study that we are talking about a specific period in the students' academic life and be wary of making any assumptions about how the students will progress beyond the period we have observed[69]. Although it would be unwise to use this data to predict or generalize about the future academic writing careers of these students, it does not mean that we cannot generalize

[67] See p.13 for a discussion of this issue
[68] See Holliday (2002), p.8
[69] I would like to make clear, in light of this point, that I am only interested in this specific period of the students' academic careers and do not intend to make generalizations about their academic future based on the case study research material.

from the data for other purposes[70]. The data from these case studies can be used to draw inferences about students who are in the same situation or at the same stage of their academic writing career.

Another criticism of case studies, which was taken up by Braine (2002) in his discussion of case studies in the academic literacy of non-native speaker postgraduate students, is that they often do not obtain data from multiple sources. He claims that,

> Academic literacy is generally acquired over an extended period of time in a complex, dynamic manner, and data from multiple sources – graduate teachers, advisors, peers, journal entries, and prescribed and reference texts as well as written assignments - is needed before a complete picture can be drawn (Braine, 2002, p.63).

Although it is impossible to collect data on every aspect of a student's life within a fixed time period, it is essential to gather as much data as possible in order to try and provide what Geertz describes as a 'thick description' (Geertz,1973)[71]. In this study, information has been gathered from numerous sources, in order to try and provide a deeper understanding of the students' experience of writing. Apart from talking to the students themselves about their academic essays, I have also interviewed their Pre-sessional teachers and one of their course lecturers as well as analysing specific texts that the students have produced both for the Pre-sessional and departmental courses. The similarities and contrasts within this broad range of data have provided me with much more interesting results than if I had spoken solely to the students themselves.

[70] See discussion of generalizing from case study data in section 1.3, p.22.
[71] See p.22 for a description

To summarise, then, case studies have been chosen as the most suitable method of data collection for this study, as they provide a dynamic picture of students' experience, incorporating many different sources of information and allowing us to examine naturally occurring data. This type of data is essential to the field of second language writing research, as we cannot hope to make real progress without considering the students' perspectives on the academic issues that they consider to be important.

4.4 Collecting the data

There were two methods of data collection in this study. The main body of data was collected via a series of semi-formal, one-to-one interviews with the students, their Pre-sessional lecturers and their Departmental lecturers. In addition to this interview data, the students' written assignments were collected. Where possible, all of the drafts of an assignment were collected, but where this was not possible only the final drafts were collected. It was my intention to collect the drafts which included teacher feedback as this would provide another perspective and possibility for analysis[72].

4.4.1 The interviews

I chose to use a semi-formal interview structure with the participants. As Merriem(1988) identifies

> This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic (Merriem, 1988, p.74).

It was my intention to target certain aspects of the students' academic writing experience and this required a certain amount of structuring to narrow the focus down to particular themes. However, the questions had to be of an open nature in order to allow the students to reflect

[72] In most cases this was achieved but some drafts that the students provided had no feedback on at all. Table 4 on p.93 illustrates exactly what written documents were collected and what kind of feedback was given.

upon their own experiences. I wanted the students to elaborate upon any aspect of their experience that they wanted to and thus, although there was a basic structure, if the students deviated to an area that was more interesting, I allowed the interview to continue in the direction they dictated. The themed questions allowed me to return to my own agenda once the students had exhausted their topics. The students were interviewed on four occasions, the Pre-sessional lecturers twice, and the Departmental lecturers once. In total I executed 30 interviews.

4.4.1.1 Student interviews

The first student interview took place in the second week of the Pre-sessional course. The aim was to talk to the students at the beginning of their course to discuss their background, experience and ideas of what academic writing were, before they became accustomed to the requirements of the course[73]. In this interview the students were asked to talk about their educational experience and work experience if applicable. They were asked to talk about their experiences of learning English and then they were asked to talk on more specific issues such as 'What does academic writing in English mean to you?' and 'What do you think makes a good text?'[74] At this early point in the course, the students were also asked to talk about what they were expecting from both the Pre-sessional course and their chosen Master's programme.

The second student interview took place around the middle of the Pre-sessional course after the students had completed their first short research project. The aim of this interview was to discuss with the students their general experiences so far on the course and to particularly concentrate on their experience of writing the first research paper. The students were asked

[73] Ideally the interviews would have taken place in week one but due to administrative issues and the process of selecting participants the first opportunity was the second week.
[74] For an outline of the interview see Appendix 3

questions about the process they had gone through when they were writing, whether they found it easier or more difficult than expected and which elements of the research process had been most challenging[75].

The third student interview took place as close to the end of the Pre-sessional course as was possible. The students who take the course only have a one week break before beginning their Master's course in their chosen departments; thus, it was not feasible to arrange interviews for that time. Most of the interviews took place in the first two weeks of the autumn term as students settled in to their new departments. The purpose of this interview was similar to Interview 2 in terms of discussing their experience of writing the second research paper but also benefited from an ability to compare the two projects and discuss similarities and differences. This interview was also used to discuss their experience of the Pre-sessional course as a whole and to talk about whether their expectations about their departments had changed or not.[76]

The final student interview took place at the beginning of the students' second term in their department. In my original plans for the study, I had predicted that the students would have an assignment midway through the first term and one at the end; in other words, a similar structure to the Pre-sessional course. In actual fact, the students had to complete longer assignments that were handed in near to or at the end of the term. These assignments were then graded over the Christmas holidays and returned to the students afterwards. I had originally planned to interview the students mid-term and at the end of the term but for the reason outlined above, the students were interviewed at the beginning of the second term, once their assignments had been returned. This interview focused on the students' experience

[75] A more detailed outline of the interview is available in Appendix 4
[76] See Appendix 5 for a more detailed outline of the interview

of writing in their departments and their chosen field of study, as opposed to the Pre-sessional course with its general academic focus[77].

4.4.1.2 Pre-sessional lecturer interviews

The Pre-sessional lecturers were interviewed twice during the Pre-sessional course; after they had graded the students' first and second research projects. The first interview was to discuss how the lecturers considered that the students had settled into the course generally and how they felt they had managed with the first project. The second interview was to discuss the students' progress, how their performance on the second project compared to the first, and how the Pre-sessional lecturers considered that the students would cope with writing in their departments.[78] Although all of the first Pre-sessional lecturer interviews were carried out face-to-face and tape-recorded this was not possible for the second interview for different reasons[79].

4.4.1.3 Departmental lecturer interviews

As mentioned earlier, the departmental lecturers had graded the students' major written assignments over the Christmas break and returned them to the students at the beginning of

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[77] See Appendix 6 for a more detailed outline of the interview

[78] Outlines of both interviews are available in Appendices 7 and 8

[79] During the Pre-sessional course one of the lecturers, Fay, left to start a permanent post at another university. For this reason she was contacted by email and provided with a set of questions. This was not as effective as a face-to-face discussion. The answers were much briefer and it was difficult to elaborate on any points of interest. It is felt however that the answers to the questions still provide valuable data for analysis. The other two Pre-sessional lecturers who took part in the study left within a day or two of the course finishing. This is common practice as the majority of pre-sessional lecturers are lecturers who have permanent jobs at other institutions, usually overseas. This means that they have to leave immediately in order to return to their own jobs. Interviews with these lecturers were carried out using an internet chat programme which allowed for more interactivity and flexibility than an email-based interview. It should be noted that the interviews were still carried out through a written and not a spoken medium and this therefore meant that answers to questions were more concise than may have been the case if the interview had been carried out face-to-face.

the second semester. As a result, the departmental lecturers were interviewed once, at the beginning of the second semester.

4.4.1.4 Interview summary

A summary of these interviews is set out in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW	TIME	REASON FOR INTERVIEW
Student interview 1	Beginning of pre-sessional course	To discuss students' background, previous academic experience, and expectations
Student interview 2	After completing Project 1 on Pre-sessional course	To discuss their experience of writing Project 1
Student interview 3	After completing Project 2 on Pre-sessional course (at end of Pre-sessional course or first week in department)	To discuss their experience of writing Project 2 and their expectations about writing in their department
Student interview 4	At beginning of Spring term	To discuss their experience of writing assignments in their department in the autumn term
Pre-sessional lecturer interview 1	After grading Project 1	To discuss their opinions of the students' writing
Pre-sessional lecturer interview 2	After grading Project 2	To discuss their opinions of the students' writing
Departmental Lecturer	At beginning of Spring term	To discuss their opinions of the students' writing

4.4.2 The written data

In addition to the tape-recorded interviews, I also collected the assignments that the students submitted[80]. These documents have been used as evidence to provide support for more general discussions that have arisen from the recorded interviews. I have also employed extracts from the lecturers' feedback to provide illustration for my arguments concerning grading, the use of personal opinion, and the effectiveness of teacher feedback.

The following table shows the written documents that have been collected:

[80] In some cases the lecturers provided me with a copy and, in some cases, the students provided me with a copy, once they had been graded and returned.

Table 4: Written Documents

DOCUMENT	Yu-Fen	Tetsuya	Aran	Sally	Sunee	Luis
Project 1 Outline		X				
Project 1 Draft 1	X(f)	X	X	X(f)	X(f)	X
Project 1 Draft 2	X(f)	X(f)	X(f)	X(f)	X(f)	
Project 1 Final Draft	X(c)	X	X	X(c)	X	X
Project 2 Outline		X				
Project 2 Draft 1	X	X(f)	X	X(f)		
Project 2 Draft 2		X(f)	X(f)			
Project 2 Final Draft	X(c)	X(f,c)	X(f,c)	X(c)		
Assignment 1	X(f,c)	X(f,c)	(c)	X(f)		
Assignment 2			(c)	X(f)		
Assignment 3			(c)			

X – signifies copy of draft collected

f – signifies copy contains feedback

c – signifies copy is accompanied by a cover sheet containing final grade and feedback

4.5 Student participant profiles[81]

In this section, I provide some details of the personal histories of the students that took part in the study as, in agreement with Lillis (2001), I consider this information to be 'central to any attempt to understand their specific experiences of engaging in academic writing in HE' (Lillis, 2001, p.4). In other words, the experiences of the students, their academic careers, their professional experiences, and their English language learning experiences, will all play a significant part in how they approach their writing and how they construct their identities in the texts that they write. We cannot detach the personal histories of the participants from the 'student'.

4.5.1 Aran

Aran is a 29 year old, male student from Thailand. He was in the UK to study a Master's degree in Extensions for Natural Resources in the department of International Rural Development. This was his first Master's degree but he had previously studied a four-year Bachelor's degree in Forestry at a university in Bangkok. Prior to his Bachelor's degree Aran attended High School between the ages of 16 and 18 and Secondary School between the ages of 12 and 15.

Aran changed schools many times when he was young as his parents moved around for work. He grew up in the countryside and says that his English education was not good. He says that he really began learning English at university where he took an English course as part of his

[81] The study began with 6 student participants but only 4 of them completed the project. Both Luis and Sunee dropped out of the study at quite an early point. Luis, who was studying an MA in Economics finished the pre-sessional course and went on to do his degree at another university. I had one meeting with Luis but have chosen not to include it in the study as I felt that it did not provide valuable information that would contribute to the discussion. The same applies to Sunee. Sunee had two interviews and then decided that taking part in the study was too much of a demand on her time. For the same reasons I have decided not to include Sunee's data.

BA. Aran did not have any native English speaking English teachers but says that he practised speaking with foreigners at every opportunity. He says that, in class, they studied mostly grammar, writing and speaking. He says that he also studied writing but not much and he couldn't remember what kind.

Aran gained his place at university as part of a government 'quota'. From 100 applicants who took the government exam 20 were given places at university. The format of the exam was multiple-choice over a general subject base.

Aran has been working for six years since leaving university. He is working on a project to improve conditions for people in remote areas of Thailand. His job is to coordinate with other departments e.g. health, livestock, fisheries, to organise and plan projects. His job involves a great deal of writing in his native language, Thai, particularly budgets, project proposals and reports. He says that he learned the writing skills required on the job. In terms of academic writing Aran wrote a dissertation for his BA. He claims that it was similar to dissertations in the UK and included introduction, purpose, procedure and resources sections.

In our initial conversation, I asked Aran what academic writing in English meant to him. He stated that writing at university has a pattern. As he had already had just over a week of lessons at this point he said that his Pre-sessional teachers had told him how to write introductions, topic sentences and main sentences. A significant point to note is that Aran said, 'I think it is a fixed pattern' (Aran Interview 1).

I also asked Aran what he thought made a good text. For him, the most important thing was for the language of the text to be accessible and he further added to this by saying that texts

with lots of examples and pictures were much easier. He said that this was the way he wrote his own reports for his job.

I asked Aran what he felt good about when writing in English and what he felt less confident about and he replied that he was not happy, because he knew what he wanted to write but could not explain it in English so that the reader could understand. At this point in the course Aran had not started working on his first project but had completed one essay for his writing class. He said that it had contained a lot of mistakes, particularly in terms of vocabulary and articles (as there are no articles in the Thai language).

At the end of the first interview we discussed Aran's expectations for the Pre-sessional and MA courses. Aran had achieved a score of 5.0 on the IELTS exam and his department required a 6.5. His main intention in undertaking the Pre-sessional course was therefore to increase his IELTS score to meet his department's requirement. He also said he wanted practice his English. For the MA, Aran stated that he wanted to improve his English so as to be able to exchange opinions and information with other international students to find out how they solved problems in their own countries.

4.5.2 Sally

Sally is a 34 year old, female student from China. She is married with a young daughter. She came to the UK to study a Master's degree in Emerging Markets in the Business School. Before beginning postgraduate study Sally had worked for the Bank of Communication, Shanghai, China for twelve years. Prior to this she had studied at High school for three years before studying at an Accounting Institute. Whilst working at the bank Sally studied for a degree in Finance part time.

Sally explained that she had only studied a few subjects at High school – Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Technology and English. All her subjects were studied in Chinese except for the English class. Here she studied grammar, vocabulary, speaking and listening but did not study any kind of academic writing. Sally claimed that, even in Chinese she had not been taught any kind of academic writing but more general writing skills, like writing about people you know or things you are interested in.

At the Accounting Institute Sally specialized in Accountancy for three years. Her English studies continued here. She studied grammar, speaking and listening but again pointed out that writing was not considered a priority. Interestingly Sally says that even at that time 'I always worry about writing in English' (Sally Interview 1). Sally's job did not provide any opportunity for writing in English either. She had only been required to write one personal evaluation report per year.

Although Sally had no real experience of academic writing in English before coming to the UK she had had experience before coming to the present Pre-sessional course, as she had already attended a 'pre-Masters' course in Wales for nine months. Sally felt that as most of her peers were Welsh-speaking, she did not have the opportunity to improve her spoken English and therefore chose to change to a different course in a different city. She believed that the course she had attended in Wales was similar to the course at her current university. She had studied Academic Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Grammar as well as Use of English and British Culture.

Sally says that before starting the course in Wales she had no idea what academic writing was or in her own words she, 'didn't know the process' (Sally Interview 1). When I asked Sally

what she now considered academic writing to be, her answer clearly revealed that she had already been through a certain level of training about what academic writing at a UK university entails. She said

> **Sally**: First I must know the purpose of the question....then I must get some information, some source about this question and I must....and after I get some information I must get....to get some....to have my own ideas about this subject then I must have a plan how to write in my brain and then I will think how to organize the structure and I will write and after I will write my draft and I will repeat and find some grammar mistake and some structure mistake and then write again (Sally Interview 1).

It is interesting to note the way that Sally describes the revision process as a process of finding mistakes. There seems to be a sense of inevitability here. She does not talk about revision as a way of improving the draft but as a way of correcting all the things she has done wrong. Sally refers to her mistakes again when asked what she feels the most difficult part of academic writing is for her.

> **Sally**: Firstly I think because I'm an older student I think I always make some grammar mistake and secondly I think my vocabulary is very limited and thirdly I think I always confused how to use words...(Sally Interview 1).

Significant here is the way that Sally attributes her grammar mistakes to the fact that she is an older student. The same issue is reversed when Sally discussed what her strengths were in connection to her writing

Sally: ...I have some experience and I know some source relevant to the subject but sometime I must know how to organize some information, some source (Sally Interview 1).

Sally's status as an older student is now transformed into a positive as she feels she has more background knowledge that she can employ whilst producing her assignments.

As with Aran, at the end of the interview, I asked Sally to talk about her expectations about studying in the UK generally and the Pre-sessional course more specifically. She said she wanted the chance to communicate with people from countries other than China as 'different country have different culture' and 'it is a good ways to mix some culture' (Sally Interview 1). She also talked about the world becoming a global village and that she may, in the future, work for an international company. She saw this opportunity as a way to broaden her perspective on the world. As far as the Pre-sessional course was concerned Sally was required to take it as her initial IELTS score was low. Although Sally had already paid to do another preparation course in Wales, she was still positive about paying to do another course as she felt that 'a different university have a different teaching system' (Sally Interview 1) and 'different university have maybe different method to academic study' (Sally Interview 1). This is a very significant point that we return to throughout this study.

4.5.3 Yu-Fen

Yu-Fen is a 33 year old female student from Taiwan. She is also married with a young daughter and has worked as an English teacher in a primary school for 10 years. She teaches speaking, listening, and writing for grammar exercises to children aged between 7 and 15. She came to the UK to study an MA in English Language Teaching in order to improve her English for her job. Yu Fen's background is in languages. After her high school she chose to enter a

Professional School to study languages. She majored in German but also studied English, Japanese and Chinese. After finishing Professional School she entered university and again majored in German.

Yu-Fen first began learning English at age 12, although she says she could only write and not speak. She says that she had some native-English speaking teachers but says that, as she was young, she did not dare to speak to them for fear of making mistakes in front of them. This fear, she said, subsided as she got older and she did not find it so difficult. She says, 'If I got some mistake that means I got to do some, something better' (Yu-Fen Interview 1). The theme of making mistakes carried on into Yu-Fen's discussion of her job as a teacher. She says

> **Yu Fen**: But as an English teacher you have to speak in English but actually most Taiwanese they cannot speak English well so if you can speak English they think you are good in English but sometimes if I make some mistake just I know and I go home and 'ah today I made some mistake' but I just feel I shouldn't be this way. I have to do something (Yu-Fen Interview 1).

Yu-Fen, even in this first interview, has always talked about improving herself, about not dwelling on problems but doing something about it, and about improving her English language skills. I believe that this reveals a certain determination in her character which becomes very apparent throughout the study.

Yu-Fen's explains that when she first began learning English they concentrated on grammar and writing as she says her English teacher's spoken English was not good and she spoke in Chinese to teach them English. Yu-Fen comments on the fact that assessment was done by

written test and that often students who scored highly on the tests were still unable to speak any English.

Although there was an early concentration on writing in school, this was not academic writing. Yu-Fen mentions business letters, tests and diary writing as examples of the kinds of texts she produced. Yu-Fen says that she still finds it difficult to write in English,

> **Yu Fen**: Actually it is not so easy for me to write so many words. Not because I can't because I know what I should do but the words I know is limited because different culture. I got an idea but for me it's hard to write in English. If I write in English I think....I don't know whether English is the way....English is speaking this way or I just translate it from Chinese to English (Yu-Fen, Interview 1).

Yu-Fen says that she has not had any experience of writing a dissertation in English and that she had only one or two opportunities to write any kind of academic writing. In Chinese, she claims that she is comfortable writing in any form whether it be academic or personal but in English she finds it difficult to understand why,

> **Yu Fen**: ...everything you have to write in "academic writing". You cannot use "in my opinion". It's not your, you just can use your words but it's not your opinion. Your opinion is not so important (Yu-Fen, Interview 1).

This extract highlights an important issue for Yu-Fen that warrants detailed discussion. Yu-Fen struggles with the concept of academic writing including personal opinion or, in other words, the balance of source material and her own ideas. Yu Fen questions academic writing in English

> **Yu Fen**: I just think this question – why, when English people write an academic essay, they have to support a lot of things. Actually they just

can find something, yours, theirs, she's...., a lot of things and they, yeah, this is mine, academic writing. It's meaningful? (laughs) (Yu Fen, Interview One)

Yu Fen appears to be surprised by the extent to which academic writing in English depends upon referring to the work of others. However, she is not unfamiliar with the idea of referencing the work of others altogether, as she goes on to explain

Yu Fen: If I write in Chinese I also write academic but I think that's my things. I don't need to....also I have to look for some evidence to support my opinions but not so many. But when I read the source in my book, in my task book, 'a lot of people to support your opinion' but I just don't.... that's their opinions not yours, not the writer's opinion! This is the style of English academic writing? Is that right? (laughs) I just doubt but I can do nothing I just have to learn (Yu Fen, Interview One)

Yu Fen does not seem convinced that academic writing need rely heavily on source materials, 'It's meaningful?' (Yu Fen, Interview One), 'Is that right?' (Yu Fen, Interview One). Yu Fen claims to 'doubt' (Yu Fen, Interview One) that this can in fact be the case but knows that she has to attempt to learn this style of discourse successfully. This does not prove to be an easy task for Yu Fen and Chapter 5, "'Don't you want to hear what I have to say?" Academic writing and the expression of personal opinion' analyses this in detail.[82].

When I asked Yu-Fen about her expectations for the Pre-sessional course she stated that she wanted to learn how to do 'perfect academic writing' (Yu-Fen, Interview 1) to pass her Master's course and to be able to present her English well before her classmates and teachers.

[82] See Chapter 5, '"Don't you want to hear what I have to say?' Academic writing and the expression of personal opinion, p.107

4.5.4 Tetsuya

Tetsuya is a 31 year old male student from Japan. He is married with a young son. Tetsuya's family accompanied him to the UK while he studied for an MSc in Applied Development Studies in the Department of International Rural Development. He has worked for 6 years in the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture as a Technical Official and his government department was sponsoring him to complete his Masters programme.

At university in Japan, Tetsuya completed a 4 year BA in Agricultural Machinery and a Masters degree in Agriculture. During his university career the courses were taught in Japanese but some of the articles that they studied were provided in English. Tetsuya is very unusual in the fact that, although there was no requirement to do so, he decided to write his dissertation for his BA in English. Tetsuya has also carried over this desire to learn English at every opportunity into his study in the UK as he already had an unconditional offer to study his MSc, but decided to take the Pre-sessional course anyway. When I asked him what his expectations for the course were he said,

> **Tetsuya**: I expect in this course how to learn how to write academic writing or document in the way of the university requires (Tetsuya Interview 1).

Tetsuya also differs from the other students in that he had already completed a Masters programme in Japan. As he had found it difficult to study and work at the same time, he decided to come to the UK to study a second Masters that would also, according to him, have greater international recognition than his first.

Tetsuya began studying English aged 15. He studied it for three years at Junior High School, three years at Senior High School and four years at University. He states that although his university courses were all in Japanese he was often given articles to read in English.

When I asked Tetsuya what he believed good academic writing was he said,

> **Tetsuya:** At least it requires a conclusion, a clearly expressed conclusion. And then it need evidence. It was clearly mention the author. And by the evidence it should be logically constructed... (Tetsuya Interview 1).

Tetsuya claimed that this contrasted to his experience of academic writing in Japan where he said, 'we have no clear conception for academic writing' (Tetsuya Interview 1) and where, in his own department, 'they don't care about the construction of the writing...they are put their value on the evidence, on the experiment' (Tetsuya Interview 1). He stated that he believed the case would be similar in all departments. Tetsuya did not express any particular worries or concerns about his academic writing ability. The only thing he felt that he lacked was experience. He believed that once he had experience, he would be able to do what was expected of him.

When I asked Tetsuya about his expectations for the Pre-sessional course he said that he wanted to learn how to write academically in the way that the university expected. During this part of the first interview, Tetsuya revealed that he already had an unconditional offer from his department and that he was taking the Pre-sessional course voluntarily. This again distinguishes him from the other students as they were all working towards increasing their IELTS score in order to fulfill conditional offers. When asked about his expectations for his Masters's programme, he stated that he would like to complete his Master's and possibly go on

to doctoral research, leading to an academic career or work in an international organization like the United Nations.

Thus, the four students who took part in this study, represent a variety of ages, educational and work experiences, cultural backgrounds and attitudes to learning English.

PART 2

The purpose of the second part of this study is to examine in detail the issues that arose from the data. I begin with a discussion of the problems that students may face in trying to find a balance between expressing their own opinions and supporting their ideas with secondary source materials, and then proceed to a discussion of feedback and grading practices. It is my intention to reveal the way that institutional changes in these specific areas would be beneficial to the L2 student and would improve their chances of negotiating credible academic writer identities.

Chapter 5

'Don't you want to hear what I have to say?' Academic writing and the expression of personal opinion.

In attempting to find an academic identity that is accepted by the established academic community, international students may struggle with finding an appropriate balance between their own ideas and opinions and those of the 'experts' that they use as evidence in their academic work. Students from different cultural backgrounds may have had different ways of dealing with incorporating sources into their texts or may have no experience of incorporating expert evidence into their texts at all. In this study, Yu Fen provides a good example of a student struggling to deal with this issue.

For Yu-Fen one of the biggest areas of confusion was whether the lecturer wanted to hear her opinions in her writing or not. In the first draft of Project 1 on the Pre-sessional course, Yu-Fen struggled with how to approach the given topic of 'Sustainable Development'. This extract from an interview with her Pre-sessional lecturer, Fay, is very revealing both in terms of Yu-Fen's perspective and the perspective of the lecturer.

Fay: Initially I got the impression that she found it really frustrating that I didn't want her opinions – well, its not that I didn't want her opinions but I couldn't accept just her opinions. So she wanted to write pure anecdote and she, she does sort of manifest frustration. She's one of these people that does actually get tense and so when I kept insisting, you know, you need to use sources, you can't just put in your opinions

and that sort of thing she went to the absolute extreme and her first draft was just copied and um....

Interviewer: .... It's just a series of extracts.

Fay: Exactly. And she said to me "Well, I didn't have time," she said, "to do any writing but I have acknowledged the sources," she said. "Look, they're all in inverted commas and everything." So I said, "Yes, but fine but you have to have your own ideas. You have to have ideas of your own." So she said, "Well, do I have my ideas or do I not have my ideas?" "Well, yes you do but you can't just be on your own in there. You really do have to find research that proves it because if you just say something somebody else can just say something back and, you know, you need support." So it seemed that the whole idea of looking for sources to back up your ideas was completely alien to her... (Fay, Interview 1)

Yu-Fen, in her interview, stated that she had no experience of writing academic essays in English. She majored in German, also took Japanese, English and Chinese, and so obviously has a proficiency for languages but she had only been required to write personal narratives in English. Project 1 was a new experience for Yu-Fen. It is clear from this extract that the issue of expressing personal opinions versus using source material was problematic from the beginning of the course. However, the comment made by Fay that 'the whole idea of looking for sources to back up your ideas was completely alien to her' (Fay, Interview 1) seems to insinuate that Yu Fen is incapable of rather than unfamiliar with the concept. Other comments made by this lecturer work towards a negative construction of Yu Fen. In her first interview,

Fay discusses the fact that Yu Fen requires a lot of assistance with her work and approaches Fay on a regular basis for tutorial help. Fay states,

> **Fay:** ...I'd really like to be able to be able to get hold of her and sit her down and help but again she's not a very clear thinker. She hasn't yet learnt to think in steps so she's skittering all over the place and then panicking because she's skittering and then skittering more...(Fay, Interview 1)

In her second interview Fay talks about the difference between Yu Fen's first and second projects. She says,

> **Fay:** I still felt that she hadn't developed many reasoned opinions. The level of argument was still very limited. Mostly anecdotal and rather, dare I say, child-like (Fay, Interview 2).

When I asked Fay to clarify what she meant by 'child-like' she says,

> **Fay:** The simplicity of her sentences and apparent thought processes seemed to me to be so unsophisticated as to be child-like (Fay, Interview 2).

I would like to suggest here that Fay has fallen into the trap of equating an unfamiliarity with a particular literacy practice with being illiterate. Fay is constructing Yu Fen as 'child-like', where the child would represent someone who had not reached the level of full literacy. In his article, 'Orality and Literacy: From the Savage Mind to Ways with Words' (1994), Gee discusses

> ... how in anthropological studies the term *literate* in the dichotomy *literate/non-literate* came to replace the term *civilized* in the older dichotomy *civilized/primitive* and then how a distinction between different cultures (non-literate vs. literate ones) came to be applied to different social groups within modern technological societies like ours, charecterizing some as having 'restricted literacy' and others as having 'full literacy'. The importance of these developments is the link often assumed to exist between

> literacy and higher order mental skills, such as analytic, logical or abstract thinking (Gee, 1994, p.168).

As we discussed earlier[83], as Lillis argues

> ...there is no justification for constructing [students] as 'illiterate', or by associating use of this literacy with cognitive development, construing them as intellectually inferior in some way (Lillis, 2001, p.40).

The lecturer, in this case, must always be aware of the fact that this is a different literacy practice that the student is unfamiliar with. The comments the lecturer makes seem to lose sight of this and confuse Yu Fen's confusion about how to deal with a new discourse with an inability to cope with studying at a university level.

The following short extracts reveal what the lecturer thought about the second and final drafts of Project 1.

> **Fay:** ... the second time round. She did make an effort and she was beginning...That's right. So the second time I could see that she was trying. She got the idea. And then the third draft is so substantially improved on the first draft that I don't know if it's hers. That's what's bothering me is that she seemed so desperate that I'm not really very sure.

It is interesting to compare Fay's opinion with Yu-Fen's opinion. When asked how she felt about the project in general she said:

> **Yu-Fen:** Although I don't, I'm not interested in this topic it's useful for my writing because it's, I have to be trained in writing for my project but in the future I have to write more and more. But I think it's a little upset to write this kind of project because you have to use a lot of evidence,

[83] See page 11

everything you should....Actually I got some idea for myself but if I write down my ideas teacher say you have to look for some evidence to support your idea. So, the second, I tried. I changed my way. I, first I find some evidence and then I write my idea. I think it's according to the evidence to create my idea, not my own....actually it's really not my own idea because teacher say, "Your own idea is nothing because you are not famous. You cannot say my own idea is..." Nobody support you so I think in all the project you have to find evidence to support idea. I just asked my teacher, "I don't think it's my own idea. I just collect something."

Interviewer: So you feel like you couldn't give your own idea?

Yu-Fen: Yeah, because my idea has no support. So I just collect some information to finish my project.

Interviewer: Is that how you feel about the final draft as well?

Yu-Fen: Yeah. I have to do this way because teacher say this is formal style. You have....everything needs evidence. That I never do in Taiwan. In Taiwan I can say anything and I maybe....people in Taiwan can understand me easily even though I'm nothing but they also understand what do I want to talk about. But here language is limited and your idea, maybe the culture, cultural distance between teacher and me...

There are a number of issues that emerge here. Yu-Fen

1. sees a dichotomy between her own ideas and material from the sources
2. believes the teacher is not interested in her opinion
3. believes her paper is just a collection of evidence to support the thesis

4. considers that it would not be done this way in Taiwan and people would respect her opinion more
5. sees a possible cultural conflict between herself and the teacher

In *The Politics of Writing* (1997) Clark and Ivanic state that

> Many writers approach writing, particularly academic writing, without a sense that they have anything worth saying. They do not see it as their place to have a position to argue or an experience or idea worth communicating to others. Viewing oneself as an 'author' – feeling authoritative, and feeling the right to exert a presence in the text, is often related to the sense of power and status writers bring with them from their life-history (Clark & Ivanic, 1997, p.152).

Yu Fen came to the Pre-sessional course with a very firm feeling that she had a right to an opinion and a strong sense of power and status due to her position as both a mother and an English teacher. She says that in her own country she can freely express her opinions in her writing and would be respected for doing so. It seems that rather than gaining confidence and feeling more authoritative in her texts, Yu Fen has her confidence taken away by the unfamiliar requirements of the academic discourse community she is entering. From this point, Yu Fen struggles to reclaim her authoritativeness, as she tries to work out how to successfully incorporate her own opinions and the source materials into her academic writing. As Street points out

> Whether we attend a course or school, or become involved in a new institutional set of literacy practices, through work, political activism, personal relationships, we are doing more than simply decoding script, producing essays or writing a proper hand: we are taking on – or resisting – the identities associated with those practices (Street, 1994, p. 142).

Yu Fen is working hard to establish an appropriate academic identity that will allow her to express herself in the way she wants to, whilst being accepted as credible in her new context.

In her article, '"The lecturer doesn't want my opinion." Mismatched expectations: pedagogical approaches', Fiona Cotton (2004) discusses a very similar situation to the case presented here by Yu Fen. Cotton discusses a Malaysian Master's student who had submitted an assignment for one of her courses that had been very heavily plagiarized from the internet. Like Yu Fen's assignment

> Each source had been carefully cited, but the student had made no attempt to write in her own words or to critically evaluate the topic under discussion (Cotton, 2004, p.91).

When this student discussed her assignment with her EAP tutor, the student expresses the same view as Yu Fen – 'But the lecturer doesn't want to hear my opinion!' (Cotton, 2004, p.91). This example of lack of understanding of institutional expectations provides the stimulus for Cotton's article and leads her to investigate a pedagogical tool for enabling students and lecturers to discuss expectations of teacher/student roles, in order to raise awareness in students. In Cotton's own words, the three major objectives for the study were:

> to identify the international students' beliefs about teaching and learning in the particular institutional context; to identify the extent to which the beliefs and expectations of the international students and those of their lecturers are mismatched; and finally to use the survey to raise awareness in students of any mismatched expectations between students and lecturers before evaluating its effectiveness as a pedagogical tool (Cotton, 2004, p.95).

There is clearly a need for explicit discussion of expectations; however, the approach that Cotton has taken to this study is very much biased towards the expectations of the student being the root of the problem rather than those of the teachers. In the extract above, Cotton

explicitly states that the survey will be used to 'raise awareness in students of any mismatched expectations' rather than to raise awareness in lecturers of any mismatched expectations that the students may have. As discussed earlier, it seems that a large part of the problem is that much research and discussion focuses on this perceived student deficiency, rather than on ways in which the institution and its constituent parts are failing to make their expectations clear.

The case of the Malaysian Master's student raised several questions for Cotton (2004, p.91) about the beliefs of postgraduate students and how they differ from their lecturers and about how to deal with this pedagogically. However, in my opinion, there was another question which seemed to be missing from the equation. How did this student almost reach the end of her course without the teacher realising what the problem was and dealing with the issue? This indicates the need to raise awareness in lecturers as to what the students are expecting. It also indicates the need for more contact and opportunity for discussion and negotiation between student and teacher throughout the semester. This would enable students and lecturers to deal with these issues at an earlier stage rather than having to deal with the symptoms of a lack of communication at the end of the semester [84].

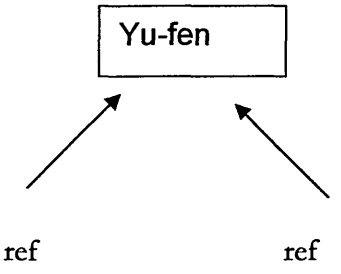
As the example from Cotton (2004) shows, Yu Fen is not alone in her confusion about whether her teacher wants to hear her opinion in her assignment or not. For her, at this stage in her first project at the beginning of her Pre-sessional course, there appears to be a dichotomy between her own opinion and the evidence from the sources. She seems to see them as mutually exclusive rather than as two entities that should fuse together to produce a whole. Her first draft is a series of quotations loosely grouped into categories with no attempt

[84] See p.163 for another example illustrating this problem

to discuss or link them in any way. The only sections that contain something that is recognizable as Yu Fen's words are the introduction and an attempt to conclude the essay. As the interview extracts above show, Yu Fen told her teacher that she did not have time to do anything else but when she spoke to me it was clear that at this point she did not know what was expected[85].

Part of the feedback from her teacher on the first draft states:

> You must write in your own words. The source references are only to SUPPORT what you want to say.



(Fay, written feedback on Project 1)

In an attempt to illustrate how sources are used to support ideas Yu Fen's lecturer drew the above diagram. In her second draft, Yu Fen seems to have taken the structure of the diagram literally and to a large extent each paragraph follows the same structure: an attempt at some discussion which includes uncited material from sources with a reference underneath. Here is an example section from Project 1 Draft 2.

> At first, some people in cities get the inexplicable diseases because of bad quality of lifestyles in cities. Although the relationship is often difficult to demonstrate statistically, cancers and heart diseases often appear to be associated with urban air,

[85] The claim to have not had enough time may have been an attempt to save face in front of the teacher.

> water and climactic modifications. In addition, the urban way and environment lead to greater stress and anxiety. Some couples in the cities can't have babies easily, because of the working environment and stress. And the children in the cities are more aggressive and impulsive. Therefore, the urban health diseases are getting in a large number, and people are aware of the environment and life ways in the cities.
> (Ian Douglas, 1983)

Yu Fen, in order to try and construct a way of bringing her own ideas and evidence from the source materials together, has followed the teacher's advice to the letter. Yu Fen is still uncertain about how to structure the discourse and has constructed the paragraph in a mixture of her own words and those of the source material without differentiating between the two[86]. However, she has cited the source at the end of the paragraph, as it seems she believes the teacher's feedback was suggesting. The teacher acknowledges the improvement in the essay in her feedback at the end but ends with the following statement:

> This is better in that you are using your own words. Now you need to link your ideas to academic research (Fay, written feedback on Project 1).

This does not seem to give Yu Fen any more information. She has been told that she has to link her ideas with academic sources but the problem is that Yu Fen does not know *how* to do this. This feedback is also confusing in that Yu Fen is using her own words both correctly and incorrectly in the above extract in her unsuccessful or incomplete paraphrasing and the teacher does not differentiate between the two. Her feedback is positive and therefore misleading. It does not help Yu Fen clarify the difference.

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[86] See discussion on plagiarism and patchwriting in Chapter 6 'Avoiding Academic Identity: Patchwriting and the Invisible Writer'

At this point in the course, Yu Fen made no comments about her teacher's feedback. However, I would suggest that the teacher's written feedback added to Yu Fen's confusion over the issue of how to strike a balance between using her own opinions and using quotations from source material[87]. This is further illustrated by the feedback on the final draft of the first project that was submitted for assessment. Yu Fen's teacher, as shown above, stated in her first interview that she was unsure as to whether Yu Fen had written her final draft. She says,

> ...the third draft is so substantially improved on the first draft that I don't know if it's hers. That's what's bothering me is that she seemed so desperate that I'm not really very sure (Fay Interview 1).

However, the feedback on Yu Fen's final draft does not seem to reveal any sense of doubt. In fact, the feedback would seem to suggest quite the opposite. In the space provided for additional comments it says

> An excellent attempt to use source material.

In addition to this, although the project only received an overall grade of C+, Yu Fen receives a B- for 'Use of Source Material'. It seems that the teacher has put aside her suspicions and given Yu Fen the benefit of the doubt, however, her message seems to suggest to Yu Fen that she has dealt with the source materials adequately and has, in fact, made an 'excellent attempt'. I would like to develop this point but in order to do this, it is necessary to consider Yu Fen's second project.

The second project that the students were required to complete was on a topic of their own choice, rather than a general topic dictated by the course handbook. The students were required to choose a topic that was relevant to their field of study. After much discussion with

[87] I am only referring to the written feedback as it appears on Yu Fen's drafts. I cannot comment on the teacher's spoken feedback in tutorials.

her teacher[88], Yu Fen settled on the topic 'The advantages of using storytelling to develop children's oral language in EFL'. The feedback that Yu Fen received on this project left her feeling angry and upset with both her teacher and the Pre-sessional course in general. She explains the problem in the extract below:

Yu Fen: ...you know my project teacher Fay, I really, at that time I really sad because you know my first draft, I discuss with her very much, very often because I'm, I really worry about my score. I know I'm not very good but I still I do very, very hard and you know? The first draft she say good. And then my final draft didn't pass. So, did you know I just don't understand why you give me good but you give me a C+. (Yu Fen Interview 3)

Yu Fen is frustrated with the teacher's feedback for two reasons; because it was misleading i.e. she told her it was good and then the paper did not receive a 'good' grade, and because she felt the feedback was inadequate i.e. there was no detail telling her where she had made mistakes, therefore enabling her to revise and reformulate the weaker areas..

Yu Fen: Because you know my project has passed to JS [89]. Did you know? This is the first draft. She just give me 'good' but did you know I got some comments from JS. He give me a lot of comments so I rewrite. This is now my second. My second draft I do, I rewrite for many, many parts. Although it's still not good enough but I really try to make it better. Not because of Fay because of JS. But I really doubt if JS didn't give me comment Fay would give me any comment. Because she just give me this word and then finally this record.

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[88] The selection of the topic for the second project was also not straightforward and differing accounts of the process were given by both Yu Fen and the Pre-sessional lecturer. The lecturer claims they discussed the issue and chose the title together. Yu Fen claims that her lecturer did not allow her to use her original topic and persuaded her to pursue this alternative.

[89] JS refers to the Pre-sessional course director. Yu Fen's paper was passed on to the course director and the director of the MA programme she was applying for as they were concerned about her suitability for the course.

What does it mean? If I do something wrong you should give me, you should give me some.....

Interviewer: ..... should tell you here?

Yu Fen: Yeah. (Yu Fen Interview 3)

There are two issues concerning written feedback here. Although, on the positive side, on the Pre-sessional course students did receive feedback on early drafts of their projects, it seems that, in Yu Fen's case, the written feedback was both overly optimistic and therefore misleading as, if the paper had been 'good', it surely would have received a higher grade. In addition to this, the written feedback was insufficiently detailed and, therefore, Yu Fen felt that she did not have sufficient information to enable her to work on revising her paper adequately.

These examples illustrate that Yu Fen struggled with adapting to a new style of writing, a style that required her to balance her own opinions with those of the source materials she had read. Although this is not a problem particular to Yu Fen, the examples reveal that Yu Fen was unsatisfied with the help she received on her Pre-sessional course. We have seen that the Pre-sessional lecturer appeared to make false assumptions about Yu Fen's ability to think clearly or 'think in steps' (Fay, Interview 1), and that Yu Fen was unhappy with the contradictory feedback that she felt she received from her lecturer. Yu Fen's situation clearly points to the necessity of discussing the issue of feedback in more detail[90]. At this point, I will move on to look at another aspect of personal information which presented itself, through the data gathered in this study, to be a significant issue in the construction of academic writer identity, and an issue that highlights the way that institutional policies and practices present

[90] This will be elaborated upon in Chapter 7: The role of teacher feedback in helping L2 students establish an academic writer identity.

discrepancies that make the establishment of an academic writer identity more difficult for the L2 student.

5.1 Approaches to the use of 'I'

As discussed in Chapter 2: Idenity and the L2 Writer, one of the ways in which a writer's identity is explicitly revealed in a text is through the use of the first person pronoun. As Hyland (2002) states

> First person ... is a powerful means by which writers express an identity by asserting theeir claim to speak as an authority, and this is a key element of academic writing (Hyland, 2002, p.1094).

For this reason, I have chosen to devote one section of this study specifically to the analysis of the way that the issue of the first perrson was dealt with by both students and lecturers. Lea and Street (2000) draw attention to the most important issue surrounding the use of the first person pronoun

> Many different conventions were to be found around the use of the first person pronoun in student writing. Even within the same courses, individual tutors had different opinions about when or if it was appropriate to use this. Such conventions were often presented as self-evidently the correct way in which things should be done (Lea and Street, 2000, p.42).

The results of my study seem to echo the results that Lea and Street (2000) discovered in their study of student and tutor literacy practices. In addition to this, however, this study also presents new and significant data to add to the discussion arena. Besides the fact that the data from the students and lecturers in this study reveals that there were many different conventions surrounding the use of first person pronuns, it also reveals that, although it seems that students need to be aware that the decision to use the first person relies on a sound

knowledge of context, the Pre-sessional course did not adequately prepare them for this. In fact, the lecturers on the Pre-sessional course generally applied a one-rule-fits-all solution and advised the students to avoid using the first person completely[91]. I would suggest that as the use of the personal pronoun was such an important issue, it should be dealt with more thoroughly on an institutional level and lecturers on the Pre-sessional course should be more aware of the expectations of the departments, as some of the students on the course received lower grades for their assignments because of a confusion over this issue.

The participants of this study dealt with the issue of including the personal in academic work in different ways. Firstly, I would like to examine the way that the Pre-sessional teachers dealt with the use of the personal pronoun.

5.1.1 Ian

On the Pre-sessional course, in Tetsuya's first project on the topic of Sustainable Development, he chose to use expressions which contained the personal pronoun. For example,

> On these definitions, I think that many of the problems of urbanization can be solved by a policy of sustainable development (Project1, draft 2, p.1).

> I totally agree his first point because it is clearly shown in his Asian cities study that... (Project 1, draft 2, p.3).

[91] It is important to note that this may not have been the policy of the Pre-sessional course itself but the personal stance of the lecturers involved in the study.

On the other hand, I can not perfectly agree his second solution... (Project 1, draft 2, p.4).

I believe that appropriately combined sustainable development policies can solve the car problems (Project 1, draft 2, p.4).

Whereas I agree his first point, I do not agree his second point (Project 1, draft 2, p.4).[92]

In the feedback on this draft, the teacher commented on the fact that his language, at times, was too informal and did not integrate well with the rest of the essay which utilized the passive voice. The teacher also suggested that he should "Generally avoid sentences which contain 'I think', etc." (Project 1, draft 2, p.7). As a result of this feedback, Tetsuya changed the examples of informal language that his teacher had highlighted. The changes are shown below:

On these definitions, this paper will argue that many of the problems of urbanization can be solved by a policy of sustainable development (Project1, draft 2, p.1).

His first point is appropriate because it is clearly shown in his Asian cities study (Project 1, draft 2, p.3).

On the other hand, his second solution is not always valid... (Project 1, draft 2, p.3).

[92] This example was edited out of the final draft.

Appropriately combined sustainable development policies can solve the car problems (Project 1, draft 2, p.4).

Tetsuya was very pragmatic in his discussion of this issue as the following extract from our discussion illustrates:

Interviewer: One of the things that I noticed that your teacher said was that there were some examples where you were using informal language and he says you should avoid using sentences like 'I think'. What did you think about that feedback?

Tetsuya: Ah, so, yes. At the same time in writing class I have same subject.

Interviewer: So you discussed that around the same time in your writing class? What did they tell you in your writing class?

Tetsuya: So, yes. As a, my teacher says the same thing. I should avoid `I'. For example `I discuss' would be changed, `it should be discussed'.

Interviwer: So they tell you to put it in the passive?

Tetsuya: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And does that.....how does that feel when you are writing? Is that easy for you to do when you're writing?

Tetsuya: Yeah. I also heard that in Japanese its also used passive sentence so its also, I heard that in Japanese some teacher, some English teacher say that we should not use passive structure we should use.....what should I say?

Interviewer: Active?

Tetsuya: Active. So I followed that advice but it was wrong so I will change it.

Interviewer: When you came to writing the final draft did it cause you any problems to not be able to say `I think', `I believe'?

Tetsuya: Oh there's no problem.

Tetsuya had been told by an English teacher in Japan that you *should* use personal expressions in academic writing; therefore this is what he had done. When his teacher on the Pre-sessional told him that he should not, he simply decided that the advice he had previously been given was incorrect and switched to what he considered to be the correct form. For Tetsuya, the use of personal expressions and the personal pronoun in his academic writing at this stage of his course seems to be a simple choice. Tetsuya does not perceive the use of this kind of language to be flexible according to context or task. He seems to be prescribing to a study skills view that academic writing is a set of discrete, fixed rules and conventions that have to be learnt. In Canagarajah's (2004) terms[93], it would seem Tetsuya is taking an 'accommodationist' approach to identity in his writing. In other words, he is very willing to alter his text, as his lecturer has suggested, and adopt the dominant discourses. The fact that Tetsuya claims he has 'no problem' with this suggests that he shows a 'more conscious internalization' (Canagarajah, 2004, p.284) of the dominant discourses rather than feeling any resistance towards the suggestion that he cannot present himself as the author of the text through the use of the first person pronoun..

In his first interview, Tetsuya's Pre-sessional teacher, Ian, discussed the reasoning behind his decision to highlight all of the expressions using 'I' in Tetsuya's first draft. As you will see from the extract below,[94] the teacher admits that he was trying to `discourage' Tetsuya from using

[93] See p. 41 for a discussion of Canagarajah's (2004) typology

[94] Although this extract is a little long it does illustrate the process that the teacher experienced in trying to think through and explain the reasoning behind his feedback.

personal language (Ian, Interview 1). The extract reveals that the teacher suggests one reason for his decision but, on further analysis suggests something else. Whether this is because he was uncertain as to his reasons or whether it was because he was suggesting reasons as he was familiarizing himself with the paper again is not clear. I would suggest that the hesitation and inability to clearly formulate a reason for his decision highlights the dilemma that the teacher faced in dealing with this issue.

Interviewer: There were a few areas where he uses personal, subjective language and that was part of the feedback that you gave him.

Ian: Yes, yes, because I was trying to discourage it (laughs).

Interviewer: I mean, although he's a stronger student and he's obviously dealing with the sources and processing it a lot better than, say A[95] was, would you still discourage him from doing that?

Ian: Yeah. In a sense.....it's difficult, it's difficult. I mean I do have a problem with it 'cos one of the causes here, one of the things I highlighted was "I expect or hope that the possibility is high". It's not really the fact that he's using the `I', it's the fact that, it's the rest of the sentence that doesnt really work. Um.....

Interviewer: It's just a bit kind of vague and in there for no reason?

Ian: Yes, and.....

Interviewer: So if it was more purposeful than just...

Ian: Yes. And perhaps, here "Whereas I agree with his first point I don't agree with his second point", That's another one where I...

Interviewer: Would you say that was more acceptable?

[95] This indicates the name of a fellow student

Ian: No, cos it isn't really saying an awful lot, I agree with this and I don't agree with that. Why? It's not that he agrees or disagrees with point one or point two it's just the way that he's expressing his agreement or disagreement. Because he actually doesn't express it, he just says "I agree with this and I don't agree with that"...

Interviewer: So...

Ian: ...which isn't very meaningful.

Interviewer: So if he had elaborated there with reasons...

Ian: Yeah yeah.

Interviewer: ...would it have been acceptable?

Ian: Would I have accepted it? (laughs) Mmmm. Hard to tell. Probably again, I wouldn't actually because his evaluations.....I would have perhaps.....the using the first person in an evaluation I don't think is a huge problem and I probably wouldn't have picked it out if it was, something meaningful was being pointed out. "Oh I am for the first point" doesn't add anything.

Interviewer: OK.

Ian: Although I have elsewhere....."And which I have highlighted. Mmmm. I think it is because he did it an awful lot. Looking at it: "On the other hand I cannot completely agree", two lines down, "I think that...". A few more lines down, "I believe that...". A few more lines down, "I am for...". He's done it rather a lot. Chances are that had he done it less and had he done it appropriately that I probably wouldn't have made an issue of it at all. Because the last sentence in this I like, "I believe that appropriately combined sustainably developed resources can solve

car problems" is fine. It's a good way of ending that paragraph. But I feel that he was doing it a lot and not very appropriately. So my way of dealing with that was to say don't do it at all. Mmmm.

Interviewer: OK. So if he, in his second project, if he does this again, I mean if he insists on having this subjective point of view, making it clear that it's his evaluation and not disguising it behind the passive...

Ian: If it's done nicely then I'll, I'm, I'm happy with it because he's strong enough to be able to do that really and his evaluation is good. Um..... but within kind of, within some kind of limit... (Ian, Interview 1)

Initially, Ian says, `It's not really the fact that he's using the `I', it's the fact that, it's the rest of the sentence that does not really work' (Ian, Interview 1). When questioned further, he says that, even if Tetsuya had elaborated on his opinions he probably would not have accepted it and then he goes on further to find another reason for his decision; `I think it's because he did it an awful lot' (Ian, Interview 1). Although all of these reasons are justifiable in themselves, it is the fact that Ian is uncertain as to his reasons that is interesting. To summarize his reasoning, Ian says, `I feel that he was doing it a lot and not very appropriately. So my way of dealing with that was to say don't do it all' (Ian, Interview 1). The point that I would like to make here is that, although Tetsuya seemed to be satisfied to be told to change his style of writing, the feedback that he has received from his teacher is unsatisfactory. To deal with a problematic language issue by telling the student to avoid it is not beneficial to the student. Tetsuya will have to learn how to use this personal voice effectively in his academic writing[96]. The Pre-sessional English course would seem to be the ideal opportunity to analyse the issue and prepare students for the fact that they may be required to use a number of different voices

[96] In fact, his first assignment in his department required him to do so.

in their academic writing. They need to be taught that flexibility is required, that different rhetorical styles will apply to different contexts and that a number of styles may even be employed in their own particular academic field. To suggest that the personal voice should be avoided is placing the student in a disadvantageous position and denying them access to information that may make it easier for them to be more successful at establishing an authoritative academic identity and achieving higher grades. I believe that the example above is a prime example of what Lillis describes as `the institutional practice of mystery' (Lillis, 2001).

5.1.2 Following the 'rules'

Other teachers chose to deal with this issue in a different way. Leo, for example, felt that the personal pronoun could be used in academic essays but felt that it was only appropriate in the conclusion. The following extract reveals Leo's opinions on the use of personal language in academic writing,

Leo: Yeah, yeah. I mean I have told them to use passive voice as much as possible.

Interviewer: And do you think that's what they should be writing for the project, you know, no negotiation?

Leo: In the evaluation? Well, I said in the conclusion. I generally tell them.....in the conclusion, yeah, she has `I believe' and `I think.'[97] I tell them it's acceptable in the conclusion but not in the main body 'cos you can't say `I believe' and `I think' until you've presented the information and given an evaluation and then in the conclusion, you know, give your own personal ideas.

Interviewer: And if, if she had said to you, `I feel like I need to say I throughout the whole thing', would you have accepted that or...?

[97] Leo is referring to Sunee's first draft

Leo: I would have said, yeah, as I said in the writing class. Academically it's given less weight and again I just tell them these are the rules, follow the rules, dont use `I', don't use `I think' in the body till you get to the conclusion `cos these are academic conventions that have to be followed whether you like it or not. If you don't want to do it, go do an evening course or something, don't do a university Masters course `cos you know, really I think a lot of academic study is just going by the numbers. Get your piece of paper `cos you need to get a job don't you. That's how I personally feel (Leo, Interview 1).

Although Leo accepts that the personal pronoun may be used in academic writing, he believes that it should be restricted to the conclusion. He states that, should this kind of language appear in the main body of a text, that the text would be academically less credible.[98] Leo's students are therefore granted permission by him to use personal language provided it is according to his strict criteria. Again, the problem we see is that the students are not being introduced to the idea that the use of personal language in academic writing varies according to context (see Hyland, 2002, Chang & Swales, 1999). Different genres, different assignments, different teachers will require different uses of personal writing and the students need to be made aware of this. The students need to be flexible or be made aware, at least, that flexibility is required. To provide a restrictive one-rule-fits-all solution to the problem, as Leo has done, is an insufficient solution as, once they reach their department of study, different modes of discourse are likely to be required. In addition to this, as Hyland (2002) and Tang and John (1999) have shown[99], 'the first person pronoun in academic writing is not a homogeneous

[98] It could be argued that Leo is providing a simple solution to a complex problem by providing the students with a concrete rule to follow but I do not believe that this is an effective solution. I believe that the key to this issue is teaching the student about flexibility and adaptation to context. This one step approach does not provide them with enough flexibility to deal with different assignments they may be required to complete.
[99] See p. 401-42 for a fuller discussion of Hyland (2002) and Tang and John (1999)

entity' (Tang & John, 1999, p.1). It performs a variety of rhetorical functions within discourse. This has important consequences for both teachers and students. According to Tang and John,

> For teachers, the results of this study imply the need to recognise that the question is not simply whether or not the first person pronoun should be allowed or encouraged in academic writing. Rather, the issue becomes which specific type of the first person pronoun, if any, writers should use, when, and for what purpose (Tang & John, 1999, p.6).

I would argue that an approach to teaching the first person in terms of its different rhetorical purposes would be of great benefit to the Pre-sessional students as 'an understanding of the options available to them may help them to best present themselves in their writing' (Tang & John, 1999, p.6). Hyland emphasises the importance of this perspective and the responsibility that resides with the lecturers

> Teachers have an important consciousness-raising task here to ensure students understand the rhetorical options available to them and the effects of manipulating these options for interactional purposes (Hyland, 2002, p.1111).

The results of these studies, along with the data presented in my own study highlight the fact that teaching the students on the Pre-sessional course that it is best simply to avoid the use of the first person pronoun is denying them options for constructing an effective academic writer identity.

Leo sees academic conventions as a set of rules that have to be followed and states quite emphatically, `If you don't want to do it, go do an evening course or something, don't do a university Masters course' (Leo, Interview 1). This statement is, of course, very controversial. As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, there is not one single discrete set of rules that a student may follow. Academic conventions are perceived differently by individual

departments, courses, and lecturers. We only have to consider the previous example of Ian and Tetsuya to see that Ian was employing a different set of rules to Leo, despite the fact that they were teaching the same course. This is only one teacher but it is an example of a teacher teaching the same course and same materials by a different set of rules. If someone so close can be working with a different set of rules then teachers in other departments, other fields, and other courses will almost certainly differ again.

To sum up, not only is Leo denying the fact that there is any variation in academic discourse, he is also denying the student any power as an individual to negotiate a position for themselves in their academic texts. They must follow the rules as he sees them and may only express their own opinions in the conclusions of their texts. For Leo, a text which deviated from this pattern would be unsatisfactory and the student, if they chose to deviate from this pattern, would be, by inference, unsuitable for university study.

Leo is placing his students in a powerless position. He feels that he is giving them a clear set of rules that they must accept but when the students move on to their department of study and encounter another teacher who expects a different style of writing, the students will be unprepared to deal with the situation. The clear set of rules that Leo expected will have now become a different set of rules. This will be very confusing for a student who has not been informed that the rules are not clear cut and differ from situation to situation. In addition to this, Leo is denying the students any power to establish themselves as academics who can add to the development and evolution of academic discourse. Once the students enter their departments, they will have to re-evaluate their approach to deal with the new situation. This may be confusing for a student who has assumed that the Pre-sessional course is preparing them to integrate into the academic writing style of their chosen department.

5.1.3 Keeping it simple

Although Fay does not comment specificallly on the use of 'I', she does talk about how she approaches academic rules and conventions. She states,

> **Fay:** I think....well, how I feel for myself and how I feel for the students is not the same thing. I think that, personally, I don't think a lot of it matters 'cos I'm not really into that myself. However, I do think that the course material is pretty prescriptive, the course material leads us a certain way and I think that many people coming from the other side of the world, having to adopt to so many different things, um, I think it's quite useful to say, 'This is how it is done.' I don't say, 'I think this is the best way.' I say, 'This is how it's done. This is what the material says' and I actually do stand up in front of the class and say, 'Actually, I don't agree with this.' I do express my own feelings. However, the university is asking you to do this and I said, 'Also, when you get into your departments you'll probably find a lot more flexibility here and different expectations but here and now on this course we're doing this.' And then, so I do tend to sort of steer them towards, 'Let's do what the book says while we're here' (Fay, Interview 1).

Fay appears to believe that she is simplifying matters for the students because, as newcomers to the university and to the UK they have a multitude of issues to deal with.

> **Fay:** It's saying you're in a foreign country, play safe. Play by the rules and then later on you'll be able to find which ones you can break and so I apply the same to pretty well everything (Fay, Interview 1).

However, I would argue that Fay is complicating things for the students. In the first extract she sets up a contrast between what 'the university' wants, 'the university is asking you to do

this' (Fay, Interview 1), what the Pre-sessional course wants, 'here and now on this course we're doing this' (Fay, Interview 1), and what the departments will expect, 'you'll probably find a lot more flexibility here and different expectations' (Fay, Interview 1). Although Fay is explicit about the fact that there will be differing expectations of the students once they are in their departments, she does not elaborate upon this. Fay prefers to deal with the 'here and now' or the immediate context. She emphasises the fact that her students will deal with academic writing in the way that is set out by their coursebook and leaves the fact that the departmental expectations may be different for the students to deal with later. In other words, although she explicitly recognises the need for adaptability, it is not incorporated into the pedagogy of her classroom. This must be confusing for the students, who in taking a Pre-sessional course, are presuming that it will prepare them for study in their departments. Fay is also setting up a contrast between what is expected on an institutional level and what is expected on an individual level. This puts the student in a dilemma. Should we be doing what 'the university' wants or should we be doing what the particular instructor wants? Although Fay intends to simplify matters for the students, her verbalising of the conflict between institution and individual seems to be potentially a greater challenge for the students.

The idea of keeping things simple at this Pre-sessional stage is also raised by Ian. When talking about Aran and the use of the personal pronoun he says,

Interviewer: ...do you think the conventions are just conventions and there's a bit of negotiation that can go on?

Ian: Um. Well, in terms of what I do with them is that I'd probably discourage, I probably would be strict with them even though I don't necessarily think that.

Interviewer: So you would not subscribe to that in your own writing?

Ian: Probably not, although within, within....there's still certain things that I wouldn't do but as regards Aran I think he really needs to be clear. I mean there's a need to be clear what might be expected of him so that then once he's....can negotiate from there. Without having a good understanding of what expectations might be it would be very hard to negotiate, I think.

Interviewer: So he's got to have the fundamentals first?

Ian: Yeah. I think so. Really what I'm doing at this stage is fundamentals...(Ian, Interview 1).

Although both Fay and Ian are arguing that by telling the students not to use the personal pronoun, they are providing a simple basic rule that will help them to gain 'the fundamentals' that will be of benefit to them in their departments, they are not aware of what the departments require. If they were aware, they would realise that this is not a basic element that can be taken as given, as each tutor and each course may vary in their approach. By his own admission, Ian reveals his lack of awareness of the disciplinary requirements that his students will face,

Ian: ..I have no idea what different departments expect or anything. I haven't a clue.

Interviewer: Do you think that's something that should be incorporated into the course? Do you think we should have more knowledge about the departments?

Ian: It would be very difficult ...even with that knowledge I'm not going to be able to remember who needs to do what. It wouldn't help me. It would help them but not me (Ian, Interview 1).

Ian argues, that it would be very difficult for him, as a teacher of a Project class with fifteen students from different departments, to deal with knowing what each department required. However, I would not suggest that the Pre-sessional teacher needs to be fully versed in each departmental lecturer's specific requirements but that there are ways in which the Pre-sessional lecturers could incorporate the varied expectations of the departments into their Project classes. For example, as Hyland suggests, heteregeneous classes can be used to discuss and contrast students' disciplines which would 'satisfy students' demands for personal relevance, but also reveal to them the multi-literate nature of the academy' (Hyland, 2002, p.8). I suggest it is not Ian's responsibility to teach the students what each of their course lecturers might expect but it is the Pre-sessional lecturers' responsibility to teach the students that their course tutors will have differing expectations and that the use of the first person is one academic convention among many that does not have a hard and fast rule and may vary from context to context.

Evidence from this study shows that the Pre-sessional teachers' approach to the use of the first person in academic writing conflicted with that of some of the departmental lecturers who took part in the study. I would like to illustrate these examples.

5.1.4 The departmental views on the personal pronoun

Despite the fact that students were discouraged from using the first person, the departmental lecturers, Mary, Andy and Jack all viewed the use of the first person favourably and in some cases positively encouraged it.[100] Andy says,

Andy: I'm OK with that – using personal language – because it's actually becoming more prevalent in the journals now (Andy, 25.02.04).

[100] It is important to bear in mind that I am not generalizing to any other lecturers or courses apart from the specific cases mentioned here.

and Jack says,

Interviewer: And do you accept, in the assignments that you ask for, do you accept a personal, personal language? Do you accept, you know, using 'I think', 'I believe'?

Jack: Oh yes. No, no I'm happy with that...I don't mind them using the first person, I'm happy about that, or a very personalized style, providing that they have either evidence from the literature or from their experience to illustrate what they're saying. Where I will get upset with them is where they're just being polemical. And in Development Studies it's actually quite easy to fall into that (Jack, 06.05.04).

Mary, talks about this in a little more detail as it had become an important issue for Yu Fen and some of the other L2 students in her class.[101]

Mary: Well this, it came very much into these assignments because it seemed the ones who'd been on the pre-sessional, um....Yu Fen was a good example, were being told that they must keep their personal element out of it and write in a distant third person style and, um, I said, 'Well that is completely inappropriate for this particular subject area of language and gender' and I said, 'Every single article we have read has a personal element in it.' Use of 'I' is now common. It may be that the kind of impersonal approach is more applicable to kind of scientific discourse where kind of quantative research methodology is being used but particularly in more kind of humanities areas which deal with more subjective experiences and which use qualitative research

[101] Although the the extract is lengthy it does explain the confusion that arose over the use of the first person.

methods, um there, well, the element of first person is essential, often extremely essential that you're actually affirming your first person status and that it's important that you do because its recognised that a lot of, most research is subjective to certain degrees. All you're doing is making that point explicit and so that's one part of it. The other part is that I think that as International students they have a fantastic amount to bring to bear to their studies here and a lot of that is autobiographical, um, and I see as perfectly kind of valid, legitimate evidence that they draw upon their home background, their home cultures and their experiences as a teacher where they live and that represents an important part of what they bring to assignments. So, um, again I don't think I probably made that explicit enough, um, during the course when I was talking about the assignments. Now I think I realise how important it is. But I think I did say, you know, 'You are a Chinese teacher. You've had various different experiences of say, the teaching of literacy. It is important that you bring that perspective into your assignment, um, so that it's understood where you're coming from.' Because a lot of their essays were very impersonal, very disembodied, um, and very remote and almost archaic, you know. The subject, the essays weren't successful cos they were like kind of antiques...

Interviewer: ...with the amount of effort that had gone into making them impersonal?

Mary: Yes, impersonal. They had distanced it and turned it into something that didn't matter to them at all or didn't appear to be related to them at all.

Interviewer: And that was the point that you said a little earlier on that you disagreed with.

Mary: Yes, because they had been told....that was one of the key issues. They said, 'Oh well we deliberately didn't bring ourselves into the essay because we were told not to. So I didn't.' I said, 'Look, for certain subject areas it's the opposite. You should bring yourself into it.' And again I would refer to all the articles they've read which do exactly that.

Interviewer: Was Yu Fen one of the students who had an issue with this?

Mary: Yeah, I think she did actually. I think we did have a conversation about that. I mean she was certainly, in no way was she cross, she was just curious, um, and I was trying to say, you know, 'In future you must believe in your own experience as evidence, that is evidence for.....alongside research literature and all the rest of it. That is part of the evidence you bring and its discussion'. So, yes we did talk about that.

Interviewer: And how did she, did she manage to bring herself into her writing?

Mary: No. Other Chinese students did more but hers was a very mpersonal, I think, impersonal assignment and as a result I think it was a weaker study. Because, you know, she didn't make real sense or understanding of the issue from her own point of view. (Mary, 10.03.04)

It is clear from the extract that Yu Fen experienced difficulties in dealing with personal language in this assignment. I am not suggesting that the Pre-sessional course teacher was

responsible for this but I am suggesting that a more flexible approach to the teaching of the use of the first person would have helped Yu Fen to deal with this situation. As Mary says, the students were following the advice that they had been given and avoided the use of personal language. They were not aware that they might have to adapt this practice depending on the requirement of the assignment. This left them in a disadvantageous position.

The use of the personal pronoun is 'critical to meaning and credibility, helping to establish the commitment of writers to their words and setting up a relationship with their readers' (Hyland, 2002, p.1093). All of the departmental lecturers who took part in this study either accepted or expected the students to employ this rhetorical strategy, depending on the requirements of the assignment. The Pre-sessional lecturers, however, had all instructed the students to avoid the use of the personal pronoun. The students, then, who are in the difficult position of trying to negotiate their positions as writers within their academic discourse communities are not receiving the appropriate support and instruction that would help them to achieve their goals. It seems clear that some reformulation on an institutional level of the pedagogical approach to dealing with issues of first person pronoun use and writer identity is essential.

In relation to this, I will now discuss the way that some of the students in this study struggled to establish a credible academic writer identity in their texts because of an over-reliance on source materials. I argue that this is an inevitable developmental stage of writing which students will progress through, given the right support and guidance. However, I will also illustrate that the students in this study do not receive enough support, therefore leading to the conclusion that decisions made on an institutional level are effectively prolonging this developmental stage.

Chapter 6

Avoiding academic identity: patchwriting and the invisible writer

6.1 Redefining plagiarism

The plagiarism of second language students is often explained with reference to cultural difference, being ascribed to a difference in cultural thought patterns and differing cultural perceptions of Intellectual Property Rights[102]. Scollon (1995) has argued that a traditional view of plagiarism is an ideological position which privileges a concept of the individual established within the European Enlightenment and, as such, obscures our understanding of the construction of identity in intercultural discourse (Scollon, 1995, p.3). As Pecorari (2003) argues, a traditional perspective on plagiarism cannot explain why students who have grown up within the Anglophone academic discourse community[103] also display use of 'non-prototypical plagiarism' (Pecorari, 2003, p.320). In addition to this, such a perspective cannot explain why students continue to misappropriate sources, even after they have been introduced to the idea of plagiarism and the way that plagiarism is considered at universities in the UK. In order to explain this phenomenon, Rebecca Howard, (1995) introduced the concept of 'patchwriting', where patchwriting is an overdependence on source material which enables students to learn to write in a new discourse. Rather than being seen as a deliberate attempt to deceive, this kind of writing is perceived to be a developmental stage and students will move on to a more independent style of writing, once they become more familiar with the conventions of the academic community that they are writing for or, indeed, as they become more confident and comfortable with their own writing. As McGowan (2005) highlights, it is essential to understand that

[102] See discussion in Scollon (1995), and Pennycook (1996)
[103] Pecorari takes this term from Belcher and Braine (1995)

> Students, both native and non-native speakers of English, who are new to the academic environment and the specific language demands placed on them in their various disciplines cannot be expected from the outset to have command of the academic language in which to present an argument or provide evidence from the literature in support of their own views (McGowan, 2005, p.2).

Significantly, as Pecorari (2003) emphasises, 'as a developmental stage, rather than a deliberate deception, patchwriting deserves a pedagogical, rather than a punitive, response' (p.321). Coulthard's (2004) discussion of definitions of plagiarism also supports the idea that a problematic definition dictates the way that the problem is treated. He uses a specific definition of plagiarism taken from his own institution, the University of Birmingham. The definition is as follows [104]:

> PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING IN EXAMINATIONS
>
> Plagiarism is a form of cheating in which the student **tries to pass off someone else's work as his or her own. ...Typically, substantial passages are 'lifted' verbatim** from a particular source **without proper attribution** having been made. To avoid suspiscion of plagiarism, students should make appropriate use of references and footnotes (Coulthard, 2004, p.1).

The problem, as Coulthard points out, is that plagiarism is usually defined as a conscious and considered choice displaying an intention to deceive. The above definition phrases this as 'tries to pass off'. However, as Coulthard says

> ...teachers and markers cannot evaluate intentions, but only whether a text actually *does* pass off - in other words, many students may indeed be guilty of 'passing off' without being guilty of 'intending to pass off' (Coulthard, 2004, p.1).

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104 The bold highlighting is used by Coulthard in order to draw attention to the phrases upon which he wishes to focus.

Altering our definition of plagiarism or replacing it entirely allows us to take a different approach to the way it is treated. This position is echoed by Chandrasoma, Thompson and Pennycook (2004), who argue that the term plagiarism implies a moral issue rather than an issue of learning. They prefer to use the term 'transgressive intertextuality' which, they argue, allows us to tackle the problem with a pedagogical response rather than a judgemental and moral one (Chandrasoma *et al.,* 2004). There is an important shift in perspective here. An approach to inappropriate textual practices that takes into consideration the developmental stages of the students' writing experience enables us to 'decriminalize' the process and approach it from the perspective that there are pedagogical solutions to the problems.

Although, at present, there is little empirical evidence for the existence of patchwriting (Pecorari, 2003), there are studies which provide firm support for the idea that plagiarism is not a straightforward issue of dishonesty and intention to deceive but a complex issue encompassing a range of problems. Official recognition of the legitimacy of patchwriting seems to have been acknowledged by Dr. Ellie Johnson Searle, director of the Joint Council for Qualifications, in an article published by the BBC (BBC, 04.04.04). She states

> Pupils can change the language and grammar and put it into their own words, but if they are going to that sort of effort they are essentially self-teaching and are learning the subject anyway (BBC, 04.04.04).

The argument here is that students who take small parts of source material and incorporate them into their own work are working through a developmental phase and are not attempting to perform plagiarism with the intent to deceive.

Thompson's (2005) study of two undergraduate students from different linguistic backgrounds emphasises the fact that inappropriate textual practices cannot always be attributed to

dishonest intentions. One of the students who took part in Thompson's (2005) study elaborated upon the reasons why students may use sources inappropriately. Whilst acknowledging that some students may have 'bad intentions' (Thompson, 2005, p.6), she also mentioned that a writer may not understand the essay question properly and this might lead them to rely too heavily on source material, the writer might feel too nervous to express their own opinions, they may be facing serious time constraints, or the writer may have made a mistake in their note-taking and therefore have forgotten the origins of a particular source (Thompson, 2005, p.6). Thompson's study suggests that plagiarism is not a straightforward issue and emphasises the importance of a patchwriting stage in student writing. Drawing on Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic nature of language[105] and Kristeva's notion of intertextuality[106], she argues that

> Conceptualising academic writing (and indeed all writing) as a form of patchwriting that is dialogically and intertextually constructed, allows us to move away from the paralysing concept of authorship as singular and unitary, which so often serves simply to block constructive ways of dealing with questions of knowledge production, writer development and textual ownership (Thompson, 2005, p.10).

Pecorari's (2003) study of the academic writing of 17 postgraduate students at three British universities also provides support for Howard's (1995) concept of patchwriting. She found

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[105] Bakhtin emphasized the dialogic nature of language. He focused on language as utterance, where an utterance takes on meaning through negotiation rather than individual control. He argues that 'The word, directed towards its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (Bakhtin, 1981, p.276)

[106] 'Kristeva emphasises the interconnectedness of all texts and has developed a concept of intertextuality that is synonymous with a theory of subjectivity. Kristeva argues that different identities are realised both in the production and consumption of texts; furthermore, textual meanings are neither fixed nor stable, but are created in the "continuous movement back and forth in the space between the origin and all the possible connotative meanings" (Kristeva, 1996, pp. 190-191cited in Thompson, 2005, p.3))

that four of the writers who were interviewed gave 'a misleading impression of their source use' (Pecorari, 2003, p. 13), but that this could not be attributed to an intention to deceive but had to be explicable by other means. She found support for the idea of patchwriting from her studies and discusses the institutional implications for this situation. She says,

> ...patchwriting should be recognized as a widespread strategy, and efforts to address it should start with the understanding that most students will use sources inappropriately before they learn how to use them appropriately and focus on supporting novice writers and ensuring that they emerge from the patchwriting stage. Secondly, patchwriting should be recognized as a neutral, rather than a stigmatizing error (Pecorari, 2003, p.19).

Evidence from my own study illustrates that students may not be receiving enough help to emerge from the patchwriting stage[107]. In other words, late feedback, inadequate feedback, or feedback that simply focuses on the content of the paper rather than the language of the text are not sufficiently useful for the student in helping them to develop to the next stage of their academic writing and that they may often struggle to establish a more independent writer identity without significant input from the lecturer detailing specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies. McGowan (2005) argues that although lecturers often implore students to use their own words in their writing, this is not, in fact, what they wish to see. She also argues that second language students who may feel that their words are not appropriate for 'academic English' rely on borrowing chunks of academic text in order to present a level of academic writing that they believe to be acceptable

> International and other EAL students will sense that they are disadvantaged when 'their own words' appear simplistic because they are awkward transcriptions of their spoken words or culturally inappropriate translations from their first language, and in

[107] See Chapter 7, 'The role of teacher feedback in helping L2 students establish an academic identity'

> their own estimation simply 'not good enough' as academic English. It takes little imagination to see how, left to their own devices, they may 'borrow' chunks from their readings and inadvertently plagiarise these in their attempts at upgrading their language to more appropriately academic styles (McGowan, 2005, p.9).

McGowan points out that careful intervention and guidance is needed at this stage in order to help students develop to the point of greater independence in their writing (McGowan, 2005, p.4). She uses the following example of a piece of advice published by the Science faculty at Sussex University to illustrate the way that guidance may be misguided.

> Don't fall into the trap of thinking another author can "say it better" than you: your tutors are interested in your ideas and opinions, and are not expecting a perfectly polished writing style. Your writing is good enough (Sussex University, 2005 cited in McGowan, 2005, p.4)

McGowan highlights the fact that although this 'may be comforting to the students' (p.4), it is 'probably misleading' (p.4). She acknowledges that this may well be the case for the particular local context of the Science faculty that published the advice but

> ...the fact is that frequently the students' writing really is not 'good enough', and students who are non-native speakers of English can be acutely aware of this (McGowan, 2005, p.4).

It is essential, then, to be able to provide the support needed for students to emerge from the patchwriting stage and establish themselves as confident writers and producers of knowledge in the academy. One step towards achieving this is defining plagiarism in a way that, as we have discussed so far, changes the perspective from one entirely based on honesty, morality and transgression, to one that encompasses the many pedagogical issues and issues of authorial identity that may cause students to use inappropriate textual practices. It is also crucial to

ensure that any shift in definition or practice is established across the institution as differing approaches within one institution may cause problems for the students. Results of a study by Flint, Clegg and Macdonald (2006) support this view. The participants, in this case, were 26 lecturers from different departments at a post-1992 university in the UK .The study illustrates the fact that there was 'considerable variation in the way that participants conceptualized student plagiarism' (p.146), and found that 'this variation is not linked to disciplinary context but more tied to individual, personal interpretations and understandings' (Flint *et al.*,2006, p.148).This, therefore, has important implications for students as

> ...individual students may receive conflicting information on definitions of plagiarism and the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable practice from different module teachers (Flint *et al.*,2006, p.152).

Concluding their study, the authors argue that 'the challenge ahead is to consider how staff, student, and institutional perspectives can be reconciled or unified...' (Flint *et al.*,2006, p.154). Similarly, a study which explored the perceptions of plagiarism of 11 EAP teachers at South-Coast University (Sutherland-Smith, 2005), concluded that

> ...whilst teachers operate collaboratively in the preparation and delivery of academic writing programs, they approach issues of plagiarism within those programs individually (Sutherland-Smith, 2005, p.92).

It is clear, therefore, that, as Sutherland-Smith states, 'collaborative, cross-disciplinary re-thinking of plagiarism is needed to reach workable solutions' (Sutherland-Smith, 2005, p.83).

6.2 The invisible writer

Evidence from my study supports the idea that conventional definitions of plagiarism are inadequate in explaining the inappropriate textual practices that occur in some of the students'

writing. I, therefore, consider this study to be a valuable addition to the research that supports the idea of a developmental 'patchwriting' stage. I would also like to argue that decisions made on an institutional level are directly affecting the students' attempts to develop their writing and establish their academic writing identities. In other words, institutional conditions may be contributing towards prolonging the patchwriting stage rather than providing the supportive context necessary for the writers to progress.

Firstly, I will consider evidence from the data where I believe the participants of the study are concerned with the idea of patchwriting[108]. The first example is taken from the interview with Mary, who is discussing Yu Fen's assignment. This example shows the complicated nature of the textual practices that Yu Fen employed whilst constructing her text.

Mary: I felt that a lot of it was quoted directly. She did attribute so I couldn't accuse her of plagiarism but there was a sense that the difference between sections she'd written and sections, she hadn't lifted them but she wasn't quoting them either, she wasn't, she was attributing them but not quoting them (laughs). So, but the trouble was that sometimes she was even copying sections from other people's work inaccurately (laughs). So it was a bit of a minefield really. She wasn't intending to cheat. I sincerely believe that she was...

Interviewer: Do you think that she had been trying to paraphrase but...

Mary: Yes, she was trying to paraphrase...

Interviewer: ...but not too much?

Mary: keep it as close as possible to the original, knowing that was accurate (Mary, 10.03.04).

[108] None of the participants specifically mention patchwriting and may be unfamiliar with the concept.

In order to contextualize this extract I include three extracts from Yu Fen's assignment here.

Yu Fen: extract 1

Abstract

Boys' underachievement is aware by schools, teachers and the whole society recently. Everyone is looking for the answer of failing boys. What are the factors affecting the boys' underachievement in English? This essay sets out to examine boys' performance in English and the causes of boys' underachievement. Furthermore, it will explore some methods for improving the boys' problems. Moreover, the conclusion will suggest the solutions exist for making boys' progress. Finally, the reflection upon boys' and girls' underachievement will be discussed in the final section.

Yu Fen: extract 2

Acquired stereotypes and self-perception

Children acquire deep-seated stereotypes and self-perception from the social influences. According to Serbin (in Ronald, A., 1996)

"*Children have learned that different characteristics, activities and behaviours are expected of males and females. They will conform to these sex roles in the classroom unless the teacher makes an active effort to communicate different expectation and values. If children are to be freed from stereotyping, they must be treated as individuals rather than as members of a classified group.*"

From the findings of boys' performance which shows girls as more likely than boys to have positive feeling about school and about teachers. Furthermore, girls also look themselves as working hard, well-behaved, and less likely to be bored in lessons.

Another opinion by Downes (in Ronald, A. (1996)

"The prevailing 'macho' image, to which middle and lower ability boys seem to be particularly vulnerable, is that it is simply not expected that heroes do well in the classroom. The powerful role

models from the world of sport, television, popular music, etc., are rarely projected as having academic gifts. If anything, they got on in life in spite of 'being dim at school'"

Expanded press coverage of girls' prestige over boys at schooling has caused the decline in boys' significance, prospects, and self-esteem in society and influenced boys' attitudes to education.

Yu Fen: extract 3

Affective aspects and material

Provide some useful arrangement for boys and encourage boys to learn confidently. Comnot list the following strategies that enable boys' progress. (Arnold, R., 1996)

- Even if sets are usually imbalanced in terms of boy/girl numbers, seek opportunities for occasional of short-term remixing.
- Recognize those opportunities when single-sex grouping may be desirable.
- Within sets, and to avoid the operation of stereotypical expectations about roles, ensure that, in group work, particular tasks are distributed in such as way that everyone experiences a range of roles, leading discussion, secretarial responsibility, etc.
- Provide the opportunity (and model if necessary) for everyone in a group to respond to, affirm and reflect upon the contribution of other members of the group.

Extract 1 is a section of the assignment that does not include any source material. It provides us with an example of how Yu Fen writes without relying on other texts. Extract 2 illustrates the way that Yu Fen constructed her text. The first sentence appears to be an uncited paraphrase. This is followed by a direct quotation, which Yu Fen has chosen to italicize,

presumably in order to emphasize that it is not her 'voice'. This pattern is repeated throughout Extract 2. Extract 3 illustrates the way that Yu Fen has taken material directly from the source but has not acknowledged this with the use of quotation marks, although she has cited the source.

In the interview with her lecturer, most significantly, Mary acknowledges that she did not think that Yu Fen was trying to be dishonest or cheat on her assignment. A charge of plagiarism is, therefore, not applicable as Yu Fen's intention was not to deceive her instructor. As discussed earlier, patchwriting provides a way to consider Yu Fen's experience. Mary discusses the fact that Yu Fen had been trying to paraphrase but without straying too far from the original text. Yu Fen's writing could be explained by the fact that she is still in the very early stages of learning to write academic discourse in English and is unaware of the rhetorical style required. Alternatively, Yu Fen may be aware of the style of the paper she is required to write but simply lacks adequate rhetorical skills or vocabulary to carry it out. In order to construct her essay in a way that she feels approaches the kind of academic discourse her lecturer requires, Yu Fen chooses to adhere as closely as possible to the rhetorical structure and discipline-specific vocabulary of the source material she has found. The resulting effect, apart from risking the charge of plagiarism, is that Yu Fen's academic writer identity is not very visible in the text, or at least in the sections of the text where she has constructed a patchwork of source materials. It can also be argued that this over-dependence on source material results in a lack of metadiscourse in the text (Hyland,2004), where metadiscourse is defined as

> ...self-reflective linguistic expressions referring to the evolving text, to the writer, and to the imagined readers of that text. It is based on a view of writing as a social engagement and, in academic contexts, reveals the ways writers project themselves into their discourse to signal their attitudes and commitments (Hyland, 2004, p.133).

A study by Hyland (2004) analysed the use of metadiscourse in a corpus of 240 doctoral and masters dissertations. The results showed that the PhD dissertations contained far more metadiscourse than the masters dissertations. Hyland (2004) acknowledges that this can partly be explained by the fact that the PhD dissertations are much longer than the masters dissertations and, therefore, need more authorial intervention to provide a cohesive structure. However, Hyland states

> The greater use of metadiscourse in the PhDs can also be seen as representing a more sophisticated approach to language as these advanced students sought to craft more "academic" reader-friendly prose and make more concerted attempts to engage with their readers (Hyland, 2004, p.142).

In other words, as the second language writers become more proficient in the writing expected in their field, their competence in expressing their identity as a writer in that field increases. This, I would argue, adds to the strength of the argument that Yu Fen is passing through a developmental stage of her process of learning to write as an academic in her field. Acknowledging the fact that Yu Fen is at a stage where patchwriting enables her to construct a text, although arguably an unsuccessful text, is an important step and, as Pecorari (2003), McGowan (2005) and others have argued[109], allows us to formulate a pedagogical response to the situation rather than dismissing writers like Yu Fen as plagiarizers.

Yu Fen, in her final interview, also alludes to the developmental stages of her own writing. Although she is not directly discussing patchwriting and the use of source material, I feel that her comments are of relevance here. She says

> **Yu Fen:** ...most tutor ask us to do a critical thinking about my assignment but I think it's very hard to me to do critical. If I can understand all the

[109] See p.140 for a discussion of their work

lessons, I think that's enough for me. How can I critical? (laughs) If I don't understand, how can I critical? And I think another reason is most Chinese they are used to follow other's thinking. They are not used to critical something.

Interviewer: So you think that's like a cultural difference?

Yu Fen: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So is that why you would write your assignments in....?

Yu Fen: Yeah. When I write my assignment I think I shouldn't do critical because I don't know how to criticise, yeah...

Yu Fen: ...I think my essay is according to what I read. I do maybe some organisation and, er, to tell the teacher what I learned from your course, er, and I just wrote an assignment for the homework. Actually, the opinion is from the books, not from me (laughs). That's why I told you the critical, I cannot do the critical thinking.

Interviewer: So you find it easy to summarize what the books are saying?

Yu Fen: Mmmhmm. But I think in this term I can do some critical thinking because I know, if the time pass, you know what you will do. At that time I don't because I have a lot of, 15000 words to do, so I don't have time to critical, criticise anything. This time I know what I am going to do and I'm familiar with the writing pattern so I think it will be easier for me. Yeah.

Interviewer: So you think now you've built on that, that part will come easy this semester and you can build on that one more stage

Yu Fen: Yeah. Step by step (Yu Fen, Final Interview)

Yu Fen claims that as the academic discourse is not familiar to her she is pleased if she can simply understand the sources. She feels that until the point of the final interview[110] she has been unable to attempt to 'criticize' the source material on her courses. She provides various reasons for this: cultural difference, lack of time, too much work, and the difficulty of the source material. However, she does say that she feels as if she has tackled a lot of those problems and that in the next semester she feels able to attempt a more critical approach to her writing. As she says, her approach is 'step by step' (Yu Fen, Final Interview). Yu Fen is aware that learning an entirely new discourse is very demanding and takes the view that it is impossible to master all aspects of it simultaneously. It is essential, however, that this development of academic literacy is supported on an institutional level.

Before discussing institutional support further, I will use an example from Sally's experience to illustrate the way that the patchwriting stage, an over-reliance on source materials, can lead to the invisibility of the writer. In the following extract, Sally's departmental lecturer, Andy, is discussing one of her written assignments.

Andy: Yeah, because, you see, I mean look, she's done an intro here and, um what she says, she says, 'In this essay, firstly I will discuss the role of FDI[111] in emerging markets, secondly I will discuss the trade of FDI in these areas, thirdly I will look at what FDI offers to host countries, fourthly I will explain why FDI is so unevenly distributed across emerging economies.' I think, 'Great! That's what I want to see. OK do it.' And then she doesn't do it...she doesn't do it because the sources don't do it. So um....

Interviewer: But she knows that's what she's supposed to be doing.

[110] The end of the first semester on her Masters course
[111] Foreign Direct Investment

Andy: Yeah. So this shows, that shows that, and she's obviously sort of thought it out in her head, 'How am I going to approach this but I'm not confident enough to do it in my own words so what do the sources say? Well, they don't actually do that so I can't really do that.' (Andy, 25.02.04)

Sally has clearly set out, in the introduction, what she wants to accomplish in her assignment. It is clear that she has a good perception of what is expected and knows how to organise the overall structure of her essay. In her interview, she discusses the fact that she spends a greater proportion of her time planning the assignment rather than writing it. She says, 'I spend a lot of time to thinking. I think, I think organise is very important' (Sally, Final Interview). The above extract from the lecturer, reveals that he also seems satisfied with the structure that Sally has given to the essay. Unfortunately, although the original intentions are clear, according to her lecturer, Sally does not accomplish what she proposes to do as her assignment follows the structure of her sources, rather than the structure she has imposed upon the materials. One reason for this, as Sally states, is that she does not have the linguistic ability to express her ideas, 'I get some idea but before I write, before writing, maybe when I were writing, I always feel how to describe my idea because my language is not good. I know something but I can't describe. It's a problem' (Sally, Final Interview). This leads Sally into depending too heavily on the language of the sources and therefore losing her authority as the writer of the assignment. I include an extract here to illustrate the way that Sally has used her source material, in order to clarify the discussion.

Sally: extract 1

From 1960's to 1990's, FDI has had two unique features in emerging areas. In 1960's and 1970's, the closed economic mode causes direct investment to use competitive advantage to exploit raw material or to get trade quotas. Many developing nations have

made some restrictive investment frameworks. These controls included investment size, area, location, and extent of ownership, for example. And local government also suggest that foreign subsidiaries should employ local assistant, it was another limiting condition. Al though policymakers tended to provide new technologies or skills to the local firms, but that kinds of structure only improve little to maximize efficiency in joint ventures. Otherwise, they often discourage many types of foreign investment, which they have welcomed before. For example, it covered some high-technology production. Consequently, restrictive policies can regard as a byproduct in emerging countries. The reason for this is the natural source was inelastic, so they didn't response to foreign investors at all. (IFC, 1997)

Although the structure that Sally wishes to impose is present in the first sentence, the following paragraph is clearly taken from source material. Sally has cited one source at the end of the paragraph in order to cover all of the information included, although we do not know which material comes from this source, which comes from Sally and which comes from any other source. Sally has followed this pattern of citing a source at the end of each paragraph throughout her text. In order to explain Sally's textual practices, her lecturer resorts to a 'cultural difference' point of view. He states

Andy: I mean, in a way, what you could say, you could say that this is plagiarism really, in our accepted sense of plagiarism...which leads into, what is our definition of plagiarism? What is their definition of plagiarism? Do they actually coincide?' Well, actually, they don't. Do they not coincide because it suits them not to coincide or is it really that culturally they have a completely different concept of what is plagiarism (Andy, 25.02.04).

Andy is not the only lecturer to foster this view. When asked about plagiarism, Jack states

> **Jack:** That's....I wouldn't say that that's necessarily an issue of second language in a sense that I think it may be an issue in some countries where the – I don't know whether it's appropriate- but I mean, where you might say the governance of, um, the student assessment is less than it should be and so students can get away with things that they shouldn't get away with. So there are some countries in which...., so they get kinda surprised when you pull them up for things. Um, but that's kind of culture and experience rather than a language issue, um, but it is an issue. Um, and sometimes students get....manage to convey their understanding by plagiarizing. In other words, they find it difficult to paraphrase, to be able to read something and then write it out for themselves, so they just take the lazy route in a way, I mean, the easy route. (Jack, 06.05.04)

Although Jack is a little more uncomfortable about expressing this opinion, he nevertheless discounts the idea that plagiarism is a language issue and blames it on cultural practices and lax disciplinary procedures. Significantly, he also interprets the practice of relying too heavily on sources, or patchwriting, as 'the lazy route' or 'the easy route' (Jack, 06.05.04), whereas student experiences would suggest quite the opposite. As we have discussed, this cultural explanation of plagiarism is inadequate in explaining these behaviours.

An alternative way to explain Sally's textual practices in this assignment has been suggested by Abasi *et al.* (2006). This study set out to examine the way that writers construct identities in their texts and whether the writers were actually aware of these identities. Comparisons are

made between 'more' and 'less' experienced second language writers; Abasi *et al.* (2006) state that

> In our interviews with the two less experienced participants, we encountered little evidence suggesting that their textual practices were rhetorically motivated to construct certain representations of themselves (Abasi *et al.*, 2006, p.106).

Whereas the more experienced writers had been aware of the way they portrayed themselves in their texts and had been conscious of being viewed as intertextually knowledgeable or as an experienced member of their own particular disciplinary community, this was not the case for the less experienced writers. As the examples of both Yu Fen and Sally show, less experienced writers may simply be concerned with the mechanics of expression of ideas rather than expression of academic identity. Abasi *et al.* (2006) take this further and suggest that the type of plagiarism that these students fall into 'could be more profitably considered as an issue of authorial identity in terms of students' perceptions of who they are as writers' (Abasi *et al.*, 2006 p.112). They illustrate this with reference to a student, Mina, who, according to Abasi *et al.* (2006), handed in an assignment where she had copied chunks of text from an MA thesis that she had found that had recently been supervised by her professor. As she knew her professor would be familiar with the material, it is clear that this cannot be defined as a case of plagiarism with the intent to deceive. Abasi *et al.* (2006) explain Mina's position by referring to Bakhtin's idea of the 'authoritative' word versus the 'internally persuasive' word[112], arguing that students like Mina see the source material as something that cannot be questioned. Their

> ...view of sources as authoritative rather than internally persuasive prevented them from entering into a dialogic interaction with source texts to generate new meanings.

[112] Bakhtin's notion of dialogicality depends on the tensions that exist between authoritative versus internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse is that which has become socially accepted as powerful and dominant because of its historical use, whereas internally persuasive discourse has meaning and importance for the individual but is not socially upheld. Dialogism and identity formation result from the negotiation between these two concepts. See Bakhtin (1981).

> This ultimately undermined their author(ity) in the sense of having something to say (Abasi *et al.*, 2006 p.110).

In other words, these students, at this early stage of their writing career, do not feel able to appropriate the sources and exploit them in order to create their own texts. Instead, they feel that the words of the source materials are definitive and cannot be reinterpreted for other purposes. Mary supports this view when she says

> **Mary:** They're so dependent on the texts they use.
>
> **Interviewer:** Yeah.
>
> **Mary:** Yeah. I think it's a lack of confidence...
>
> **Interviewer:** A lack of confidence to change it?
>
> **Mary:** Exactly. I think they feel, 'This is saying it in the correct way. I won't say it in the correct way. Better to stick closely to the original words.' They tend to do that (Mary, 10.03.04).

These writers must therefore work through this stage of writer development in order to progress to a more successful level of writing. This may explain why students like Sally appear to 'hide' behind the materials that they use in their texts, rather than asserting their own authority. If we add this explanation to the idea that a lack of a sophisticated knowledge of the discourse required to construct a successful academic text, we can see how students like Yu Fen and Sally are at a certain developmental stage of their writing which can be usefully equated with the idea of patchwriting rather than plagiarism. As mentioned earlier[113], it is essential that this is recognised by the institution and that specific pedagogical strategies are employed to support these students as they progress to using a more sophisticated academic discourse.

[113] See p.144

I would now like to discuss the way that adequate and timely feedback may help these students to move on from the patchwriting stage.

Chapter 7

The role of teacher feedback in helping L2 students negotiate an academic identity

Feedback became an issue at several points throughout this study. We have seen in Yu Fen's case the lack of adequate feedback on a particular assignment left her angry and frustrated but other students experienced different problems. Sally, a Chinese student studying an MA in Emerging Markets, found that she did not always understand the feedback that she was given on her assignments. Furthermore, even if she was experiencing difficulty, she did not approach her teacher to ask for clarification[114]. In addition to these issues, there are two other important points to note. Firstly, although students on the Pre-sessional course were given both oral and written feedback on their first project before having to hand in their second project, this was not the case in their departments. Students were required to hand in second assignments before receiving feedback on the first ones. Secondly, although there was a tutorial system in place on the Pre-sessional course for students to receive oral feedback on projects throughout the composition process, this was not always the case in the departments. The availability of lecturers for oral feedback and discussion seemed to depend on the particular pedagogical perspective of the individual lecturer. I would like to discuss these two points and provide evidence from the data to illustrate the way that feedback can be used more effectively to support L2 students in their attempts to develop their academic writing skills and writer identity.

Aran, Tetsuya, and Sally all reported that they handed in assignments without having received any feedback on the previous ones. This signifies that they had no feedback to provide them

[114] See section 7.1 Clarifying Grading Practices

with detailed information on whether their initial assignments had been satisfactory or not. Ferris (2003)[115] illustrates the importance of receiving feedback at regular intervals throughout the writing process when she states,

> Most L2 composition instructors, researchers, and theorists now agree that teacher feedback is most effective when it is delivered at intermediate stages of the writing process, when students can respond to feedback in subsequent revisions and may thus be more motivated to attend to teacher suggestions (Ferris, 2003, p.123).

Lea and Street (2000, p.44) discuss the fact that the modular structure of courses means that students do not receive feedback on their assignments until after the module has finished, effectively signifying that they do not receive any feedback that can be employed to enable the students to improve upon their next assignments. They point out that this is an organisational issue, a decision made at an institutional level which affects the conditions of students' writing. They say,

> The institution within which tutors and students write defines the conventions and boundaries of their writing practices, through its procedures and regulations (definitions of plagiarism, requirements of modularity and assessment procedures etc.), whatever individual tutors and students may believe themselves to be as writers, and whatever autonomy and distinctiveness their disciplines may assert (Lea and Street, 2000, p.44).

I would also like to emphasise the fact that decisions on an institutional level directly affect the way that students are able to negotiate a position for themselves within the academy. Although this particular example refers specifically to feedback on written drafts or assignments, my study has shown that all the major issues that the students faced are ultimately resolvable by institutional change. Specifically, the problems students encountered with the use of the

[115] See also Ferris, 1995; Krashen, 1984; Leki, 1990 and Zamel, 1985.

personal pronoun may be resolved if Pre-sessional teachers employ a more flexible approach to teaching in this area[116], problems of plagiarism and patchwriting may also be lessened by an institutional acknowledgement of the different reasons for plagiarism practices rather than adhering to policies which are purely based on honesty and integrity[117], and students may be able to achieve greater progress in their academic writing if institutional organisation structures are altered to ensure that feedback is received when and where it is necessary, rather than simply at the end of modular courses.

It is essential for these students to receive feedback on their writing before handing in another assignment, as they are relying on their departmental lecturers for essential discipline-specific information. If part of the process of becoming an accepted member of the academic community depends on completing a form of apprenticeship (see Lave & Wenger, 1991), then it is essential for the departmental lecturers to provide the appropriate circumstances for this role. Unfortunately, for most of the students in this study, there was not enough contact with the lecturers, either through written or oral feedback, to constitute a real apprenticeship[118]. Although Yu Fen was lucky enough to receive tutorials and extensive feedback on her assignments, the other students handed in assignments and did not receive feedback before handing in the next ones and also received limited attention in terms of tutorials[119]. Andy, a

[116] See Chapter 5, 'Don't you want to hear what I have to say?' Academic writing and the expression of personal opinion.
[117] See Chapter 6, Avoiding academic identity: Patchwriting and the invisible writer
[118] It is important to note that this situation has arisen from the fact that there is a greater demand on lecturers' time and resources due to increased student numbers and increased workloads. It is also important to note here that many lecturers are 'sessional lecturers' who are paid by the hour for the classes they teach and for some tutorial times but any other work they carry out is essentially unpaid.
[119] This is partly due to the increased workload of lecturers. A recent article in the Times Higher Education Supplement reports, 'The University and College Union is demanding action after an analysis by the Higher Education Statistics Agency revealed that students outnumber academics by more than 30:1 at some institutions. The highest ratio in the sector is 46 full-time equivalent students per academic' (Tysome, 2006, p.1). The article continues to talk about the problems that lecturers face, 'Some complained of rising workloads and stress levels, with seminar groups growing almost as large as lecture groups, and lecturers being "mobbed" by students desperate for more one-to-one work with tutors' (Tysome, 2006, p.1).

lecturer on the MSc in Emerging Markets, talks about the fact that when the students come to complete their dissertation at the end of the year he finally meets his students properly.

Andy: When they're doing their dissertations, which is after all the exams are over generally, and like in the summer I'm in here and they come in and we have a good chat and you actually get to know the student then and you know, you find out what their aims are and what they're trying to do um....but it's like, that's like at the very end when the game's over really... (Andy, 25.02.04)

As the lecturer himself points out, becoming acquainted with the students and having time to spend on tutorials for their dissertations, although obviously useful, occurs at too late a stage. In my discussion of the Malaysian Masters student in Cotton's article (2004)[120], I noted that opportunity for discussion earlier in the course would have been a solution to the student's problem. It is clear that L2 students would benefit from opportunities for discussion with their tutors throughout their courses, particularly at the beginning. It seems obvious to state that problems that may occur in students' writing in their dissertations at the end of the course may well have been solved at an earlier point in the course had they had the opportunity to receive input from their lecturer.

In addition to the fact that students did not receive adequate feedback in time to revise subsequent drafts or assignments, the students often encountered problems with the quality of feedback that was given. As we saw earlier in this discussion, Yu Fen was dissatisfied with the feedback she received from her Pre-sessional teacher. Although Sally did not claim to be dissatisfied with the feedback she received, she stated that she did not always understand the feedback that she received on her assignments. Even though she did not understand, she did

[120] See p.113

not approach her departmental lecturer, as she felt this would have been inappropriate behaviour. She stated, 'I want, I want to ask but I think nobody ask' (Sally, Final Interview). If there had been a tutorial system in place on Sally's course, she may have felt able to discuss the feedback with her lecturer and address the fact that she did not know what it meant. However, this system was not in place. Her teacher, Andy, stated that if students were inclined to emailed him with draft versions of their essays throughout the semester, he would be happy to reply,

Andy: Yes, there's no mechanism apart from that they can email it to me or show it to me or they send me an outline or an idea or something and say I wanna do this or I wanna do that and I say, 'Yes. Good idea' or, 'Have you thought of that?' Some of them do actually send a whole draft but not many.

Interviewer: And if they sent you a full draft would you give them detailed feedback on it?

Andy: I would try to yes (Andy, 25.02.04).

However, this mechanism relies on the student initiating contact which, as we have seen, Sally is not comfortable with doing. Students who feel able to approach the lecturer will therefore benefit from feedback and advice by email but those who do not feel able to do this will forego an opportunity to receive disciplinary guidance. The same situation arose in Aran's department. When asked whether the department considered draft versions of the students' assignments Aran's lecturer says

Jack: Some students suggest that they should and we think that's a bit of a problem 'cos some will and some won't. And we think if we do that it's like we're, you know, we wouldn't say that we've half written it for

> them but there's a major contribution. Then we think if we do it for one we have to do it for all so to be fair we don't. But if someone wants to talk to me about content, or what they might say, or references, or...., I'm happy to do that but I don't want to see a document. I only want to see it in its final form (Jack, 06.05.04).

I would argue that this lack of fixed provision on an institutional level undermines the students' attempts to improve their academic writing.

The written feedback that some of the students received on their assignments has also raised important issues for this study. Ivanic, Clark and Rimmershaw (2000) emphasize the importance of feedback saying

> Ideally tutors' comments could help to build students' sense of membership of the academic community, rather than emphasizing their role on the margins of it or, worse, seeming to exclude them from it (Ivanic, Clark, & Rimmershaw, 2000, p. 61).

Some of the feedback that the students received on their assignments may not have helped to build students' sense of membership of the academic community, in that its direct and limited nature conveyed blunt messages with a lack of constructive advice to enable the students to learn and move forward. I would like to cite some examples from the students' texts.

For Project 2 on the Pre-sessional course, students were required to write a short research paper on a topic of their own choice from within their own disciplinary field. Sally chose to write on 'Management and the Role of Management in the Financial System'. Her Pre-sessional lecturer gave reasonably detailed feedback on her draft, although it was based on the language and organisation of the text rather than content issues. The feedback seemed to be quite aggressive in its tone. Consider the following extract,

- You have many spacing problems. Check through the project and change this!
- Make sure that your quotations (page 5) are correct! This has mistakes in it!!
- If you begin a quotation halfway through a sentence, you should begin like this. Managers can make, '...a significant impact on the systems.'
- Sometimes on page 7, I simply do not understand what you want to say and perhaps you do not know either! Read your work through carefully before handing it in (Feedback from Pre-sessional lecturer on Sally's Draft 1, Project 2)

The exaggerated use of exclamation marks could be seen to give the feedback an almost threatening effect. Although the lecturer seems to be quite negative here, the final draft of the project receives an A-. The final written project evaluation feedback sheet allows the Pre-sessional lecturer to give an overall letter grade, a breakdown of letter grades for the categories, Content, Use of Source Material, Organisation, Language, Presentation of Material, and a space to write additional comments. In this space Sally's lecturer wrote one comment, 'Language is your biggest area of weakness.' For a second language student at the beginning of her academic writing career, this feedback could be very discouraging. Rather than taking the time to mention specific problems and suggest possible strategies for improvement, the lecturer has provided a rather unconstructive comment. In other words, the quantity of the feedback that the lecturer provides is not sufficient to provide Sally with guidance and support to enable her to develop. Ivanic, Clark and Rimmershaw comment on the quantity of feedback that students may receive. They say,

> The quantity depends, of course, partly on how much time tutors have. However we suggest that the amount of time and detail tutors put into their responses to students' work depends primarily on their values, their beliefs about the nature of university education, about the role of writing in learning, and about the role of their responses in

all this. They will have developed particular working practices to support these beliefs (Ivanic, Clark and Rimmershaw, 2000, p.48).

The comment that the tutor wrote on the final feedback sheet seems to discount the students' language ability in one short sentence. There are no specific areas of language weakness mentioned that would give the student some material to revise. As Ivanic, Clark and Rimmershaw, (2000) explain, the limited nature of this feedback may have been due to the lack of time available to the tutor[121]. However, I would agree with the interpretation that although time may have been limited, the comment made by the lecturer would seem to reveal something about their attitude to the student, the course, the writing process and the system within which they were working. With one sweeping comment, this lecturer could serve to undermine the confidence of the L2 writer, whether it was motivated by a time limitation or any other reason. In addition, I would argue that, whether you take a skills approach, an academic socialization approach or an academic literacies approach to writing, feedback is an essential tool to help the L2 writer develop into a successful member of their chosen academic community.

When Sally moves into her department she encounters other issues with feedback. The first issue, as I stated earlier, is that the modular nature of the courses means that feedback is not being provided at a time that would be beneficial for the student. Secondly, in Sally's particular case, the feedback has not always been easy to understand. In addition to these issues, there seems to be another contradiction. Her departmental lecturer, Andy, discusses the fact that Sally relies heavily on the language of the source material she has chosen rather than committing herself to writing it in her own language. He says,

[121] This is certainly an issue for the lecturers on the Pre-sessional course who are sessional lecturers, paid on an hourly rate for the hours they teach and not for any extra time spent on grading or lesson preparation.

Andy: She is answering the question, she knows what she is doing. This is the thing, this is the frustrating thing that you get, that she knows what she's doing, she knows what she wants to say but in a sense she hasn't got the confidence to say it herself. And in Sally, it's more impressive, maybe it's a cultural thing, it's more impressive if you quote people who are saying it in good English so that it gives it that professional air because it's written in the words of professional economists etc. so therefore you read it and it looks like a professional economist has written it – well it has, they have, because that's where it's come from.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Andy: But it's not, it's not using, it's none of herself in it which is…

Interviewer: She just hasn't got the confidence to step into the arena and…

Andy: No, no. It is rare for them to do that. As I say the problem is that sometimes when they do that it actually becomes almost unreadable but I kind of think well that's OK, I'll work through this because, you know, this guy or whatever has tried to do it himself and that's….all credit (Andy, 25.02.04).

Andy feels that Sally has not used her own language to construct her text but relied on the 'words of professional economists' (Andy, 25.02.04), the source materials. On one of her essays, despite not giving any language feedback throughout the text, Andy's final comment states

Andy: Your essay – although you have phrased it in your own words – is rather derivative and relies heavily on a fairly small group of sources. That said you have nonetheless addressed the main points and

identified key areas (Feedback from departmental lecturer on Sally's Assignment 2).

Despite his misgivings about the language, Andy gives the essay a respectable grade of 62%, choosing to concentrate on the quality of the content. Sally's first essay also receives a reasonably high grade of 67%. This essay also receives no feedback on language problems and all comments written on the text refer to content issues. Without specific feedback on the problems with the language, there seems to be little for Sally to reconsider for the next assignment. The contradiction lies in the fact that, although Andy expresses concerns about the language that Sally has used, this is in no way reflected in his written feedback[122].

I would also like to discuss Aran's case here, as I believe this also shows conflicts between the grades and the written feedback. Aran, like Sally, receives an A- for the final draft of Project 2, despite quite serious language problems. Once Aran entered the department he received much lower grades on his first two assignments, 56% and 55% respectively. In the general comments section on the first essay, Aran's tutor says,

> Intro – Use of English a major limitation. The writing indicates that the author has understanding (sometimes a very good understanding) of the context and concepts of the question but only through generous interpretation by the reader/marker. See first sentence for example (Feedback from departmental lecturer on Aran's Assignment 1).

On the second essay an extract from the feedback states

> Use of English is a major limitation. However, as with the first assignment, the writing indicates that the author has understanding (sometimes a very good understanding) of the context and concepts of the question but only through generous interpretation by

[122] Although, of course, the language may have affected the overall grade

the reader/marker. See third sentence for example (Feedback from departmental lecturer on Aran's Assignment 2).

Aran's lecturer, Jack, on the final grade sheet[123], did not provide any language feedback, except to cite one sentence as an example of language problems to be dealt with. The lecturer explains that he does not have the time to give detailed language feedback,

Jack: ...I will do some English corrections but really you can't actually, when you've got, we've got ten this year each, you really don't have time to do that so I will pick out some of it and say this is wrong and everywhere else it'll be the same. But that's it. I can't....and also the problem is of course with someone like him there's so much of it that you lose what he's actually trying to say cos you just get wrapped up in the, you know, and you've got to do it twice really. So what I do try and encourage them to do is to share their dissertation experience with another student from a completely different part of the world so you tend to be making different mistakes. Or basically just bite the bullet and get somebody to edit, help you edit and I don't mind that. I mean it's their ideas and so on.

The responsibility for dealing with the students' language problems are therefore passed on to someone else. On the positive side, however, it does seem that the grades received more accurately reflect Aran's language level, whereas the A- of the Pre-sessional course seemed slightly generous.

As this discrepancy between language level and grades occurs in the case of more than one student, we might argue that it points to a problem with the grading criteria employed. We might also argue that the language professionals of the Pre-sessional course are more generous

[123] I did not have access to the final drafts so do not know whether the teacher had commented throughout the text itself

in overlooking language issues than their colleagues in the department. What is certain, however, is that students may be surprised at the lower grades they receive, once they reach their respective departments, if they have become accustomed to higher grades on the Pre-sessional course. This may also undermine the students' confidence in their writing ability in the same way that limited feedback does.

This leads us into a more specific discussion about grading and the way that grading criteria are used within the particular contexts included in this study.

7.1 Clarifying grading practices

One area of the students' experience which certainly contributed towards an 'institutional practice of mystery' (Lillis, 2001) was the way that the students were graded on their assignments. In presenting the idea of an institutional practice of mystery Lillis (2001) states

> I argue that confusion is so all-pervasive a dimension of the experience of 'non-traditional' students in higher education that it signals the need to look beyond a notion of individual confusion, towards an institutional practice of mystery. This practice of mystery is ideologically inscribed in that it works against those least familiar with the conventions surrounding academic writing, limiting their participation in HE as currently configured (p.53).

Lillis (2001) argues that so many 'non-traditional' students face problems interpreting the expectations of the institution, that it would seem that problems must reside in the obscure nature of institutional practices. I argue here that problems with availability of clear departmental grading criteria is a facet of this institutional practice of mystery and contributes towards undermining the confidence of L2 students in approaching their academic writing.

I would like to begin the discussion of grading with a quotation from one of the participants in the study, as I believe this leads us neatly into the main issue for discussion. This is a quotation from Mary, a lecturer on the English Language and Education course, who is discussing the grading criteria that she uses on her particular course.

Mary: Well, it's very difficult because I think that although the actual criteria doesn't necessarily stipulate, well, yes there is a stylistic element in the criteria yes, but perhaps not sufficient weight is given to that stylistic criteria because it's not necessarily assumed that they're going to be international students. So I think the criteria are written for first English users not second language users so although it talks about the appropriate style, um, and flair and flexibility in the use of language it's not really thinking of the 'correct' use of English. That isn't given sufficient weight and then what happens when you're making these assignments is um....you can't....it's very hard to see beyond the language and then to give them sufficient merit and the difficulty is that this is a degree in English Language and Education and it seems to me to be essential that they can communicate correctly and appropriately using appropriate academic discourse even though that isn't necessarily stated as such as a criteria. So the tendency then is to be as fair as you can to the actual content of the argument and the structuring of the argument but realizing that they cannot possibly get better marks than the lowest grade of .... you know, the D band is the sort of 40%, 50%, um, range of marks. They can't get higher than that because their inability to use English correctly is interfering with the sense of what they want to say (Mary, 10.03.04).

This extract from Mary's first interview highlights the problems that she is encountering with trying to use the established grading criteria in her department. The first and most important point that she makes is that the criteria that she has available to her were not written with the second language student in mind. The criteria were designed to grade assignments from home students. As a result of this, the lecturer feels that, although there is flexibility in the criteria to give credit for 'appropriate style', this is, in fact, intended to cater for a student's creative use of language. The lecturer claims that the criteria she is using do not enable her to take into account the appropriate and correct use of the English language which is something entirely different from creative style. This emphasizes the fact that the criteria are not designed with the second language user in mind.

The second significant point to note from the above extract is that it is clear that lecturers interpret grading criteria in a way that reflects their own interests and opinions. This lecturer says

> **Mary:** ...it seems to me to be essential that they can communicate correctly and appropriately using appropriate academic discourse even though that isn't necessarily stated as such as a criteria (Mary, 10.03.04).

For this lecturer, the grammatical correctness of the language is important. The criteria that she employs are used then to reflect the importance she places on the accuracy of the language. The result of this is that the second language students with weaker language skills cannot obtain grades higher than the D band of between 40 and 50 per cent as 'their inability to use English correctly is interfering with the sense of what they want to say' (Mary, 10.03.04).

Essentially, then, the students in this class who have any language problems will have their grades capped at a certain level, as the grading criteria are not designed to cater for their

particular language needs. An inability to 'communicate correctly' and use 'appropriate academic discourse" (Mary, 10.03.04) dictates that the grades they can achieve in their assignments are capped, although this is never made explicit to the students.

This situation is not satisfactory for either lecturer or students. The lecturer has a set of criteria that are discriminating against a section of her class and the students have a set of criteria that will not allow them to achieve high grades. In addition to this, and by logical extension, it means that the grading criteria are creating a two-tier system within the class. The home students and those international students with a higher level of language ability will be able to achieve high grades and those who may have equal or better knowledge of the content material but have more problems with their language will only be able to reach lower grades. One of the other lecturers, Jack, discusses a similar situation

Jack: ... I've....we have some Brits who, they're writing's really polished and, you know, you can, if you're not careful, because it's so polished you end up giving it high marks but you've got to....and I'm just thinking, actually he hasn't really said anything at all. You know what I mean? It's just very polished. Whereas somebody else I'm giving 55 or 54 and actually he's struggling to communicate with me really quite good understanding but this Brit is sailing through, they're really not struggling, they're really not trying very hard (Jack, 06.05.04).

The discussion with Mary continued as follows

Interviewer: Yeah, I mean it is such a dilemma because if the whole course is at that level then how, I mean how do you go forward from there? I mean, does this mean a change in the grading criteria and a change in

standards or does this mean a change in the students that are accepted on the course? Do you see what I mean?

Mary: Yeah, there's some serious points for discussion there and I don't think, um.... the course hasn't worked out the answers yet, the people who run the course have not worked out the answers yet at all (Mary, 10.03.04).

The lecturer highlights the fact that this is a problematic issue and that it has not been solved by the department as yet. Although there is obviously a problem, as far as the students are concerned and as far as this lecturer is concerned, there has not been a significant shift in departmental policy to deal with the change in the student demographic. The system that is in place in the department has not been reworked to deal with an increasingly international student population. The lecturer goes on to say

Mary: I think that where it's leading is you can't say no to the students, they have financial reasons, they have to have these students here but um, what we've got to look at is means of support and they've got, in my view to reinvest some of the money they're getting from the fees from these students into tutorial backup (Mary, 10.03.04).

Essentially, the international students attending universities in the UK bring enormous financial benefits to their departments and this lecturer believes that part of this financial gain should be invested in providing courses that benefit the international students as well as the home students. It is not enough to expect a course specifically designed with native English speaking students in mind to be suitable for those from different linguistic backgrounds. If courses cannot be revised, there at least needs to be a support or tutorial system in place to

provide help for those students who need it. In her article in the Guardian (2004), Rebecca Hughes highlights the problems that universities face in dealing with the increased numbers of international students. Benefits of having a diverse population of students include 'a sometimes refreshingly hard-working set of students and much needed hard cash for under-funded institutions', according to Hughes (2004) however, it is not without problems. The first problem Hughes mentions is that

> ...the injection of perhaps a hundred different nationalities into an institution presents quite a radical challenge to assumptions about "the student" – what they know, believe, and can do (Hughes, 2004, p.1).

As Hughes goes on to explain and as we have seen in our discussion of 'essayist discourse' (Lillis 2001)[124], the institution of the university makes assumptions about a 'traditionally envisaged UK student body' (Hughes, 2004). That is, it sees the UK student body as a group of students who have all had the same educational training in the values and practices of a particular, favoured style of academic discourse. Lillis (2001) shows us that this causes problems for non-mainstream UK students; therefore it seems safe to assume that the problems must be more exaggerated for students who have come from a different educational background, who have not been trained to see essayist discourse as the only way to communicate at university level. These students will have different perspectives and values and will have different ways of producing knowledge, which may not be given credit, as they do not conform to dominant practices in the UK. As Hughes points out, this is a 'radical challenge' (2004, p.1) for the university system and, as we have seen in the interview above, a course which relies on grading criteria designed principally for grading the essays of native English speakers is not addressing the challenge in any appreciable way.

[124] See page 11 for a discussion of essayist discourse

The second problem, according to Hughes (2004), is that the admissions policy of universities is based on the assumption that only students who have a good chance of being able to pass the course are accepted. The UK system is therefore based around grades and transcripts or as Hughes puts it, 'the academic "profile" of the applicant' (Hughes, 2004, p.2). The university accepts those students that they believe are able to successfully complete the course, making the assumption that their academic ability and their language ability are 'inextricably linked' (Hughes, 2004, p.2), and that an academically strong student will also have the language ability to cope with the course. The problem here is obvious, when you consider second language students who may have a very high academic ability but a lower level of English. Hughes' argument, and one that I wholeheartedly agree with, is that if universities want to increase admissions of international students then 'you need to move the English question from the margin to the centre of your planning' (Hughes, 2004, p.2). In other words, English ability should be considered as part of the academic strength of the student rather than being an additional consideration. It has to be considered essential in order to guarantee that the student who is accepted will have a fair chance of passing the course. This point of view is supported by the lecturer above in the same interview. She says

> **Mary:** ... we cannot accept a standard, kind of standards that are too low. You know, we have to acknowledge that this is a difficult course to do and if these students are failing so be it but its going to have to mean a sort of very strong consideration of the whole thing, um....because in order to pass an MA at this level they've got to have very good use of English and that has to be a basic criteria (Mary, 10.03.04).

This same interview highlights this issue from the students' perspective

Interviewer: I mean they're coming in with the expectation, OK, I've been accepted on this course which means I can do it, otherwise they shouldn't have taken me on, which presumably may be their attitude...

Mary: That's right. I think that they might well want to criticize the course, um, in that sense. You know, should you have accepted me and if you did it's your responsibility to ensure that I at least get through this. I think that they would have very genuine grounds for criticizing it...(Mary, 10.03.04).

The student may, of course, be extremely unhappy about being accepted onto a course that they feel they do not have the ability to cope with, as they might also assume that they would not have been accepted by the university, unless the university felt that they were capable of passing. The student may feel that the university system is unfair. Indeed, in my interview with Yu Fen, this feeling of dissatisfaction was very clear. In her third interview, she was angry and upset about the fact that, although she had completed her Pre-sessional course, she had not been accepted onto the MA in English Language Teaching that she had applied for. She was accepted onto a different course which she was happy with. However, she was very dissatisfied with the Pre-sessional experience. She says

Yu Fen: If I, at the beginning, I got 6, why, after I take the course and I never be absent, every day I walk from B.[125] to here, it takes me 30 minutes to walk here, I still got score 6? What does it mean? It's my problem or your problem? Because I'm so stupid I cannot make progress here or

[125] Indicates Yu Fen's lodgings

> because your teacher or because your course? I don't know (Yu Fen Interview 3).[126]

Although not directly related to the establishment of academic writer identity, Hughes also talks about the dissatisfaction of the international students and the damage that this may cause to the university saying that students who do not have the language ability to cope with their courses are a 'hidden risk to the whole university' (Hughes, 2004, p.2) and that repeated dissatisfaction and failure 'undermines the university as a whole, by diminishing standards or destroying its brand' (Hughes, 2004, p.2). In other words, if students whose language ability is not high enough continue to be accepted on to courses and continue to struggle through courses, receiving poor grades and failing, the reputation of the institution will be damaged. The courses will be seen as unsuccessful and students will not recommend their courses to other students considering study in the UK. This opinion was also reflected in the interview with Yu Fen, who says

> Because I talk the problem with my classmate and she just told me maybe next time she will suggest her sister to go to America because of the education system in the UK (Yu Fen, Interview 3).

If this situation continues, courses and institutions may lose both credibility and essential financial input.

As we can see then, in this case, both lecturer and student are dissatisfied with the current system, a system where the admissions policy may be placing students at a disadvantageous position, and where departmental grading criteria are working against the fair assessment of second language students' writing. The solution to this, according to Hughes (2004, p.3),

[126] Although we must be aware that students who fail to achieve what they want may externalize the fault, I am emphasizing the feeling of dissatisfaction that is clearly present in Yu Fen's experience.

'involves not only salivating over the benefits, but also meeting the costs,' of recruiting more international students. As Mary says

> **Mary:** They have to think about the money they get from the fees from these students. It is considerable and they have to look at ways of reinvesting some of that money in support, a support structure for students because otherwise those students will fail. If they fail they'll go back. It's a bad advertisement for the university and fewer students will come to the university if that happens. So they've got to think in those terms really (Mary, 10.03.04).

As we have seen with the example above, this may mean investing some of the financial gain into research into how existing departmental policies, like grading criteria, may be adapted to provide a fair assessment of all the students on the courses. Furthermore, financial input may be channeled into providing more comprehensive tutorial or language support for those students who may not have the English language ability that matches up to their academic ability. It seems clear, however, that it is not enough for the universities to continue as they are when the student demographic has changed, as the evidence, in this particular case, shows that the system is failing a certain section of the student population. If the universities desire to maintain credible reputations they must ensure that the educational experience is satisfactory for all cultural groups.

Although this discussion has led to consideration of issues concerning grading on a macro-level, I would like to return to the starting point of this section and continue with the analysis of grading criteria and the way that they help to contribute to the 'institutional practice of mystery' (Lillis 2001). As we have seen, for the students in this study, the fact that grading criteria have not been designed with L2 students in mind has led to problems. However, this is not the only issue. The lack of any visible grading criteria has also been a problematic issue for

some of the students in this study. I would like, here, to discuss the case of Sally who represents a good example of a student experiencing the 'institutional practice of mystery' (Lillis 2001) at first hand.

Sally found that when she wrote her first assignment in her department, she was unaware of the expectations of the lecturer. The students had not been provided with an assignment sheet outlining what was required for the assignment nor had they received a copy of the formal grading criteria to help them understand the expectations of the lecturer. This lack of guidelines made the writing experience difficult for Sally. In the final interview, I asked Sally if there was anything that she would change about her department if she had the chance. She replied, 'Maybe give us some, the rule of marks. This is the one thing.' (Sally, Final Interview). This is an unambiguous statement that clear grading criteria would have helped her to approach her assignment more confidently. The following extract from the same interview gives us further insight into the problems she encountered.

Interviewer: Do you think that they could do something to make that first essay easier for you?

Sally: I don't know. I'm confused. I have no idea and I think nobody give me some help and other people like me. Everybody confused what the....how to write this essay, how to....what is the 'business entities', how to organize the material, what is the correct ways to write this essay. Nobody knows.

Interviewer: So what did you do? Did you, did you go to your lecturer to find out more information?

Sally: I ask him maybe something about this topic and another people ask, er, and when other people ask I try to listen so maybe I catch something (Sally, Final Interview).

It is clear from this short extract that, in an attempt to find out information on what is required, the students must either ask the lecturer themselves or, if they feel they cannot do this, they listen to the answers given to other students. This may provide them with much needed information but it is essential to remember that not all students have the confidence, or feel it is their place, to approach the lecturer and ask for further help. When Sally received feedback on one of her assignments that she could not interpret, she did not approach her lecturer for clarification. She stated, 'I want, I want to ask but I think nobody ask' (Sally Final Interview). This desire not to deviate from what Sally deemed to be normal student protocol prevented her from asking for the help she needed, in this instance. Although it can be argued that the lecturer has not provided the student with enough information to enable them to respond adequately to the assignment, it could also be argued that this example also demonstrates quite clearly what Lillis has termed the 'institutional claim to transparency' (Lillis, 2001, p.22). In other words, although the language of the students is constructed as problematic, the language that is used by the university and the lecturers is seen as transparent and clear[127]. Sally's lecturer does not provide an assignment sheet or even a written version of the essay question; he announces the question in the lecture. His assumption is that his language is clear and not open to any kind of interpretation. He believes his meaning is unequivocal. The following extract from Andy's interview illustrates the point.

[127] Of the 'institutional claim to transparency, Lillis says, ' whilst the language of students is made visible and problematised, the language of the disciplines and the pedagogic practices in which these are embedded usually remains invisible, taken as 'given'' (lillis, 2001, p.22)

Interviewer: Do they have for the assignments, do they have like a written assignment sheet with all the details and requirements of what you want from the essay?

Andy: Er....no. They just have an essay title. But we've addressed the subject in the lectures.

Interviewer: OK.

Andy: And then they often...what I do find is that they then come back to me with the essay title which we've translated into Chinese and say, 'What do you mean by this?' and they actually go into great detail because you've got....this one here is, 'Without sufficient structural reform business entities will fail to develop.' So they sort of go through and say 'Well, what do you mean by 'structural reform'?' and 'What do you mean by business entity?' and they like to sort of....

Interviewer: ...pull it all apart...

Andy: ...they like to sort of break it all down; find out precisely what it is. I think that they have the fear that they're gonna go too far (Andy, 25.02.04).

The extract shows that the students desire more information on the essay question. This desire for clarification may signal several things. Either the information they have been given is insufficient, therefore not enabling them to establish what is required to complete the task or, as suggested above, there is a problem with the transparency of the language used to present the task, or the students have simply missed essential information that has been presented orally in the lectures. Andy interprets this desire that the students have to deconstruct and analyse its meaning is because 'they have the fear that they are gonna go too far' (Andy,

25.02.04) rather than because there is a lack of sufficient information for the L2 students to negotiate their way into the essay.

Sally, then, was unaware of any specific grading criteria when writing her assignment. She says, 'But some people, some time we discuss we also think, we didn't know why our teacher, what the rule in my class. We didn't know. (laughs)' (Sally, Final Interview). In the absence of any hard evidence, Sally speculates about what she thinks the lecturer is looking for in her assignments.

> I think a lot of the lecturer maybe focus on the idea not the language and I think some lecturer know oversea students has the weakness, the language is their weakness so if he or she think your work hard, study hard and try your best so they will didn't give you a very bad scores. I think. You not only copy some people's idea you try to describe some idea of yours. They focus on the whole organization, the whole idea. (Sally, Final Interview)

Sally, rather optimistically, believes that as long as you try and use some ideas of your own and the lecturer knows you are a hard worker, then you will get respectable grades. She assumes that the lecturer accepts the fact that overseas students will have language difficulties and will concentrate on the ideas informing the text rather than the language of the text. The belief underlying the assumption that Sally makes is that language and content can be considered separately and are not inextricably linked[128]. As we saw in our discussion of Mary and Yu Fen[129], it is not safe to assume that the lecturer will be forgiving about language problems. The students in her class were only able to achieve low grades as 'their inability to use English

[128] See p.54 for a discussion of the relationship between language and knowledge
[129] See p.172 for details of this discussion

correctly is interfering with the sense of what they want to say' (Mary, 10.03.04). However, Sally appears to have guessed correctly about her own lecturer's approach. He says,

> **Andy:** Well, I would tend to give the merit to the person who has tried to explain because, I kinda think that you can have a sort of rudimentary knowledge of what you're doing and construct nice English because you're taking it from sources and you're cutting and pasting, well you're not cutting and pasting you're providing sources and the arguments, the critical analysis is the critical analysis of your source. If you try and put it in your own language you're actually putting yourself into it and if you're sort of saying something and even if you sound rubbish at least what you're trying to do is you're mentally trying to take on board the arguments and trying to verbalize them, if writing is verbalizing, scriptorializing them and then that's more of yourself. That's what you're supposed to be doing... (Andy, 25.02.04)

Fortunately for Sally, her optimistic view of the way that her lecturer would grade her paper was supported by her lecturer's actions and viewpoint. However, the lack of any assignment sheet or visible grading criteria is truly problematic for students. If a particular course does not provide specific details, students can look elsewhere for that help. Sally refered back to the grading criteria that had been used on the Pre-sessional course which, of course, had no real relevance to the course she was studying. Sally is resorting to finding information on an institutional rather than individual level and may have encountered problems because of this.

In this Chapter, I have discussed the problems that students in this study faced concerning the issues of feedback and grading practices. I have shown that institutional practices in these areas

are not sufficient in guiding and supporting the L2 student in the development of their academic writer identities.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

To conclude this study I would like to revisit the theoretical discussions of Part One and illustrate the way that these theories connect to the data and the results of the study. In addition, I will draw the theoretical discussion down to a practical level and present a number of suggestions for ways in which the institution may provide support for L2 writers in their journeys towards constructing credible academic writer identities.

At this point, it is necessary to refocus upon the initial aims of the study. The aims were

- To analyse international postgraduate students' experiences of academic writing in the UK, with particular reference to their experience of trying to establish an academic idenity, and relate these experiences to the wider institutional context
- To examine the ways in which decisions on an institutional level support or undermine international postgraduate students' attempts to establish a personal academic identity in their writing
- To observe the ways in which the Pre-sessional English course does or does not prepare international postgraduate students for study in their chosen departments, with particular reference to the way that this may affect the students attempts to establish their academic identities
- To give voice to the issues that international postgraduate students felt were important in relation to their experience of learning to represent themselves in an academic writing context at a UK Higher Education institution [130]

[130] See p.3

In order to achieve these aims, I situated myself within the theoretical framework of an academic literacies approach[131] and followed the principles of a critical applied linguistic approach to the study of language[132]. I have interpreted the data, therefore, in accordance with the principles of these approaches[133].

This study has highlighted the importance of taking an academic literacies approach to the study of second language writing. In my discussion of these particular case studies, I have illustrated the fact that these students are not free to construct texts in any way they choose but are constrained to producing texts that function within a specific context; writing, therefore, is not an individual act but a socially situated action. I have illustrated, through discussions with both students and lecturers, that there is a dominant form of literacy in practice in the UK university system[134], a practice which tends to reinforce the idea that student writing is deficient rather than an alternative choice to the dominant discourse practice or a different way of producing knowledge.

In relation to this, this study has provided further evidence to support the claim that the nature of academic conventions are not straightforward but contested and that, not only students, but also lecturers can be unaware of this. This is particularly illustrated in my discussion of the use of the first person pronoun, where different lecturers provided clear instructions to their students on how to use or avoid using the pronoun, which conflicted with other lecturers instructions and/or requirements[135]. The data in this study reveals that this ambiguity caused

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[131] See p. 9
[132] See p.13
[133] It is essential to reiterate that the conclusions drawn from this study are influenced by the particular way in which I have chosen to select and interpret the available data. See pp. 7-8 for further discussion of the position of researcher.
[134] Or 'essayist literacy' (Lillis, 2001, p.20)
[135] See p.120 for a detailed discussion of this issue.

problems for L2 writers who were trying to enter into a particular academic writing community.

As emphasised in Section 1.3, 'My position in this study' [136], an academic literacies approach to writing asserts the fact that language constructs meanings and identities. This study contributes towards a body of literature that supports this view. In my analysis[137], I illustrated that identity is no longer considered to be a static entity, but a concept that is negotiable within discourse[138]. I argued, with reference to Foucault and Canagarajah[139], that as identity is constructed within discourse, there is always an opportunity to resist dominant discourses. However, the results of this study suggest that, although discourse theory estasblishes that negotiation is possible, material conditions within the institution limit the amount of negotiation that is possible. Although, in theory, the students could construct a writer identity which renegotiated the possibilities for academic discourse or even challenged them directly, the fact that they were unaware of the contested nature of academic discourse, that lecturer's were giving conflicting advice, that feedback on assignments was often unclear, and that issues of patchwriting and plagiarism were not dealt with sufficiently, meant that the student was not in a strong enough position to either fully assimilate to the dominant discourse or negotiate an alternative position. Ivanic and Camps[140]also discuss the fact that 'the individual can exercise the power to conform or resist the social forces that are privileging one voice type over another' (2001, p.7), but as I have stated, although it would be satisfying to believe that this was the case for all student writers, it is naive to think that this is actually the case as evidence from this study shows that L2 writers often lack certainty in a new discourse situation and would not feel

[136] See p.9
[137] See p.24, Chapter 2 'Identity and the L2 writer'
[138] Seep.24
[139] See pp. 25-26
[140] See p.38

confident enough to challenge the norm or would not have the material resources to enable them to do so. It is also possible that the student cannot decipher what the norm actually is and therefore cannot establish a relative position. In Chapter 5, "Don't you want to hear what I have to say?' Academic writing and the expression of personal opinion', I stressed the importance of shifting the emphasis away from focusing on a perceived deficiency on the part of the student to appreciating the role of responsibility that the lecturer must take in supporting student writers' attempts to integrate successfully into the academic discourse community. This is of significance here. Lecturers must also be aware that what they consider to be simply grammatical or discoursal errors in writing may in fact be attempts to resist dominant discourse conventions or privileged voice types. Overall, the conclusion to draw from the data is that decisions on an institutional level will enable students to be more successful in negotiating credible writer identities and positioning themselves in relation to the dominant academic discourses.

In the introduction to this study, I outlined the aspects of a Critical Applied Linguistic[141] approach to language. One of the most important aspects I applied to my own study was that it should take a 'problematizing- practice approach'[142], and as a consequence the study should 'account for the politics of knowledge' (Pennycook, 2001, p.42). The study has achieved this by revealing the way that the students attempts to write have been influenced by the wider social context. In particular, I concentrated on the way that issues of institutional power influence the student writers. Specific examples being, the way that courses and grading criteria are designed with native students in mind and the way that courses are designed so that feedback is not received at a time that would be beneficial to the students. In addition, the data

[141] See Pennycook (2001)
[142] See p.21 for a detailed discussion of this

in this study provides support for the idea that different departments expect a variety of discourses and that different lecturers within the same department also expect different types of writing from their students[143]. In other words, disciplines produce knowledge in distinct and contrasting ways. This study illustrates the way in which students produce knowledge as a result of their negotiation between their own personal experiences and discourses and the dominant academic discourse of their chosen discipline. At the beginning of this study, I set out my intention to 'focus on a number of case studies in order to reveal particular experiences that will contribute towards changing practices on an institutional level, so that students can be better supported in their attempts to create academic identities that work for both themselves and the academic community they are entering' (p.2). It is significant to note the emphasis placed upon the fact that the academic writer identities that the students formulate must be acceptable to the academic community and function properly within disciplinary constraints. As discussed in Section 3.3, 'Moving towards a critical EAP'[144], it is not desirable to encourage students to assimilate unquestioningly to the dominant discourse conventions of an academic discourse community or to simply reproduce established ways of producing knowledge. Students need to be aware of the idea that academic discourse is not a unified register but contested, contradictory, and more significantly, constantly evolving, therefore allowing space for negotiation of values and meanings by different writers. In opposition to this, however, it is also essential that students negotiate a writing position that, although possibly challenging, is acceptable to the target discourse community. The point that I would like to reiterate here is that although there is a tension between helping students meet disciplinary norms and helping them create writer identities that will transform the ways in which the instituions construct knowledge and produce values and meanings, it is a tension that can be eased by exploring isssues of power and knowledge with students rather than taking a purely pragmatic approach

[143] **See p.48 for discussion of this point**
[144] **See p.67**

to EAP[145]. However, it is crucial to facilitate this process by providing the best conditions possible for L2 students, and as I argue, this has to be addressed on an institutional level as this directly affects production on a textual level.

Another essential aspect to a Critical Applied Linguistic approach to language is that of the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice. Although this study has incorporated an extensive theoretical discussion, it is vital that this should result in practical recommendations for the UK higher educational context. These recommendations are set out below.

From my discussions of the use of opinion, grading, the use of the first person and feedback, it is clear that the way that students write on an individual level is affected by decisions made on an institutional level, leading to a situation where students are finding it difficult to find the right conditions to enable them to establish a credible academic writer identity. I believe that a number of institutional changes would allow the L2 postgraduate writer to be more successful and would enable them to have a smoother transition into their chosen academic discipline. I would like to outline, once again, the issues we have discussed and point out the changes that would be beneficial to the students on an individual level. It is important to bear in mind, as Pennycook states, 'Not only are questions about language always political but so are the answers' (Pennycook, 2001, p.42). The changes suggested here require a shift in perspective and more importantly, and more politically, they require a shift in resources to ensure that L2 writers realise a valuable educational experience. Based on this study, the changes I believe are important are:

[145] See p.68

1. Provision of language support

At present, international students are accepted onto their courses depending on their qualifications, an application procedure and their score on the IELTS English exam. Many of the students are given provisional offers of a place, providing they can reach a certain level of English as indicated by a high score on the IELTS exam; these students often choose to take a Pre-sessional course. All of the students who took part in this study, except Tetsuya, needed to improve their IELTS score to be accepted onto their chosen course of study. All except Yu Fen managed to do this but Yu Fen was forced to choose a different course that would accept her with a lower IELTS score. The departmental lecturers claim that samples of writing had been requested from the student during the application process. Some of the lecturers had access to these and some of them said it was dealt with on an administrative level. Those who did have access to these texts claim that they were not a real representation of the students' writing, as they had benefited from help with editing and 'polishing'.

As most of the students who took part in this study encountered serious problems due to the level of their English, we must ask ourselves whether accepting students simply based on the IELTS score is enough. Alternatively, I would argue that if students are accepted onto a Pre-sessional course with a reasonable IELTS score, if the Pre-sessional course took an academic literacies approach to teaching academic writing rather than a skills approach the students would be more aware of the issues that would face them in the departments[146]. In addition to this, if students are still accepted with the same level of language, then it is essential to invest in the language support that they will need throughout their courses. There are two ways that I believe this would be most effective. Firstly, the students who took part in this study all benefited from a chance to talk with their tutors in tutorials. The tutorials on the Pre-sessional

[146] See p.43 for a discussion of the academic literacies approach

course provided a chance to talk about language issues, to discuss their drafts, to get to know what the teacher expected of them in their writing and bring up any other issues that they may have had. The fact that the students who took part in this study did, in fact, take part in this study illustrates a desire to talk with their teachers, an interest in improving their English and an interest in their own position as academic writers. I would suggest that they would welcome the opportunity for more contact with the lecturers in their departments and would benefit from such contact. The fact that, as we saw in Andy's case, he does not meet with his students for tutorials until after they have completed their modules and writing assignments and are completing their dissertations highlights the unsatisfactory nature of such a system.

Secondly, although this would almost definitely be a controversial suggestion, it seems that, as language is becoming a central issue for departmental lecturers, there should be some investment in training them to deal with L2 writing issues. After all, these issues are no longer marginal to their jobs. Andy again provided a good example for this argument. Teaching a course on the MA in Emerging Markets in the Department of Business and Management, Andy had 60 students. Of these 60 students 56 were Chinese speakers, 2 were of other nationalities and 2 were British. Dealing with L2 writing is now a central part of Andy's role and so a stronger understanding of the issues involved can only benefit both students and lecturers. I would suggest a series of workshops or a short course in dealing with L2 writing would be an essential investment.

2. Redesigning and availability to students of assessment criteria

As we discussed in section 7.1 'Clarifying grading practices', the lack of visible grading criteria on certain courses undermined the students' attempts to write in a confident way. It is essential for the student to know what the grading criteria are in order to know what the lecturer is

expecting from their writing. More transparency in the departments' approach to this issue would benefit the L2 students. The second issue that was raised in relation to this subject is that where assessment criteria do exist and are even available to the student, we have seen that they are not always designed with the L2 student in mind. Considering the fact that such a high proportion of the students taking these courses are second language students, it would seem obvious that this should be considered whilst producing grading criteria We have seen with Mary's experience of using the grading criteria in her department that they serve to limit one section of the class to a D or E grade as the language component of the criteria are specifically designed for native speakers. With such an increase in the international student population, it seems that, on an institutional level, there must be a decision to revise assessment criteria.

3. Provision of assignment sheets

Another point raised in this study is the problem with understanding the assignment itself. How can a student, particularly an L2 student be expected to establish a convincing academic writer identity if they are unsure as to what the assignment requires? Some of the lecturers in this study provided assignment sheets outlining the title of the assignment and a description of what was required but others simply delivered the essay question during a lecture. This is clearly unsatisfactory for several reasons. Many L2 students have problems extracting all of the relevant information from lectures and may miss certain points. To include the essay titles in the lecture puts an added pressure on this type of student. Also, as we saw in our discussion of Sally, an essay question alone does not help the student decipher what it is that the lecturer is expecting from the student. Andy realises that the current situation is inadequate when he says

Andy: Yeah. This is er....perhaps this is a problem that you kind of like assume that MS or MA students have been schooled in a certain way and are used to writing essays whereas in fact because you're actually

> cross-culturally having barriers. If you chuck an essay at a student who's done a first degree here, like I have got some who've done their first degrees at Reading, chuck them any essay you kind of know what you're gonna get back anyway so you don't have to say because you know, you've got your degree, you've done essays, you've done them in the right style, one assumes, to pass so I don't, so I think I should, I think it's actually something I should be doing. I should be actually saying I want to see this, that and the other. Some of them do say, do come up to me and say, 'Well what do you want to see?' I say, this, that and the other. Some of them I write out. I email them explicit instructions and I guess that then gets passed around the community (Andy, 25.02.04).

It is, of course, unacceptable to expect the lecturers' requirements to 'get passed around the community' (Andy, 25.02.04). There has to be a system in place to guarantee that all students receive the information that they need in order to complete an assignment. An assignment sheet would contribute towards addressing this problem.

One more important point relating to the availability of an assignment sheet is that these would then be available for analysis and discussion on the Pre-sessional course. Students would be able to see exactly what was required and disciplinary differences could be discussed and exploited to raise awareness of the varieties of academic discourse that the students may encounter after the Pre-sessional course. This can only make the transition between the Pre-sessional course and the department easier for the students.

4. Provision of effective feedback

Ideally, on an institutional level there needs to be a change in the structure of modular courses to allow the students a chance to gain feedback on one assignment before having to hand in the next. If a student has no feedback, they do not know which aspects of their assignments have been successful or unsuccessful and therefore may simply be repeating the same mistakes in the next assignment unnecessarily. This is a waste of time for both student and teacher. It seems obvious that a student, particularly one writing in a second language, will need a system of effective feedback to enable them to learn as they are writing and as they are gaining more experience within their chosen academic discipline. If restructuring the course to incorporate such a system is impractical then the departments may have to think about incorporating a system of giving feedback on drafts of assignments, in order for the student to benefit from the assignment and the course. However, this brings me back to the earlier point that lecturers would benefit from having specific training in how to deal with issues in second language writing as, if their feedback is to be truly valuable, it must incorporate some language feedback rather than, as with most of the lecturers who took part in this study, claiming to just concentrate on content and leave the language issues to a proofreader, as if language and content were not inextricably linked.

5. More specificity in the Pre-sessional course

As we have seen throughout our discussion, there have been several instances where either students or lecturers have been dissatisfied with the Pre-sessional course. Yu Fen was unhappy that she felt she had not learnt anything on the course; she felt it had been geared towards grades rather than teaching. Mary had been unhappy about the way that students had been taught to avoid using the first person pronoun in academic writing, without considering either assignment or context. We have seen the differing advice that Pre-sessional lecturers have

given their students which has often made the students' attempts to complete assignments more difficult. Although I have only concentrated on these negative points about the Pre-sessional course and ignored the successful work that is done, it is because I believe these points are extremely significant and illustrate the way that the institution undermines students' abilities to establish their academic writer identities.

I believe that there are a few important elements that need to change on the Pre-sessional course, in order to help support the students in becoming successful members of the academic community. Fundamentally, the approach to academic writing needs to shift from a skills-based approach to an academic literacies approach. This would change the perspective from seeing the problem of writing as lying with the student and therefore something that can be fixed. Instead, academic writing would be viewed as a complicated set of practices that depend on particular disciplines and their particular ways of constructing knowledge. The student would be made more aware of the way that power works within the academic community. This approach also allows for the possibility of negotiation and change rather than the simple right or wrong perspective of a skills-based approach. I would also suggest that, alongside an academic literacies approach, the Pre-sessional course needs to adopt a more discipline specific approach to teaching academic writing rather than a general Academic English approach. Hyland also makes the same appeal. In his article, 'Specificity revisited: How far should we go now?' (2002), he lays out the arguments and counter-arguments for taking a general English approach. The arguments for using a general approach are often put forward as firstly, language teachers do not have enough disciplinary knowledge to teach the students what they require for their departments. Secondly, that discipline specific knowledge is too difficult for students who need to acquire a better level of general English. Thirdly, there is not enough time to do detailed, systematic analysis of specific texts and finally, that there are generic skills

that apply across all disciplines that can be taught. Arguing for a more specific approach, Hyland (2002) points out that departmental lecturers do not have the ability to teach the specific literacy skills that the students require. In this study, we have seen that some of the lecturers give no language feedback at all and leave the language work to proofreaders. This would point towards the fact that the Pre-sessional course would seem to be the place to deal with these issues or, as I have suggested, investment should be made into awareness-raising within the disciplines on how to deal with language issues. Hyland (2002) also argues that the second argument does not stand as 'students do not learn in this step by step fashion according to some externally imposed sequence' (Hyland, 2002, p.4). The students on the Pre-sessional course are just as capable of learning literacy skills on a discoursal level as on a sentence level and need these skills equally. The third argument does not make sense, as a change in approach would not take any more time or money and the final argument falls when one considers any attempts to define a common core of academic skills. It becomes too general when one tries to cover every discipline and therefore becomes redundant. I would like to argue, as Hyland does, 'effective language teaching in the universities involves taking specificity seriously. It means that we must go as far as we can' (Hyland, 2002, p.9).

The changes listed above would make substantial progress towards lifting the 'institutional practice of mystery' (Lillis, 2001) that currently prevails and enable students to take more positive and confident steps towards establishing an academic writer identity that is acceptable to the disciplinary community that they are choosing to enter. As one of the lecturers who took part in this study states

Jack: ...access to [the students'] previous experiences, their understanding of how things work, you know, how you construct things, what is required in terms of thinking about argument and the freedom to have

> argument. All that has to be learnt and it's not really – particularly if you are doing a taught postgraduate course, which in this country on the whole, are one year – you have to learn that very quickly and um perhaps what we need to do is make allowances for that which are not to say that the quality is less. I think the teaching should be at least as demanding, and what they have to study as demanding but how we understand their understanding and their progression may have to be made different (Jack, 06.05.04).

To summarize, in line with the aims of this study, this study has examined a series of case studies which illustrate international postgraduate students' experiences of academic writing in the UK. I have placed particular emphasis on analyzing the students' experiences of trying to establish an academic writer identity and the way that decisions made on an institutional level either support or undermine students' attempts to establish such an identity. In addition to this, I have provided evidence for the ways in which the Pre-sessional English course may need to be improved in order to better prepare for students for study in their chosen departments. I have discussed this with particular reference to issues of feedback and the use of the first person pronoun. Finally, I have provided a space for the students themselves to express their opinions and relate their experiences of learning to represent themselves in an academic writing context at a UK Higher Education institution. I believe, therefore, that this study provides an in-depth discussion of issues critical to the field of academic writing research. Furthermore, the issues that have arisen from the discussion of the case study data present ideas, both theoretical and practical, that have important implications and, as a result, provide a significant contribution towards research into an academic literacies approach to writing.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Research Project Information Sheet
(pre-sessional teacher version)

Contact name: Corinne Boz
Tel: 01189 761306
Email: corinneboz@hotmail.com

About the Researcher
Name: Corinne Boz
Status: Lecturer presently registered as a PhD student at Sheffield Hallam University, School of Cultural Studies.
Name of Supervisor: Professor Sara Mills
Supervisor contact details: Prof. Sara Mills, School of Cultural Studies, Sheffield Hallam University, Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield S10 2Bp; s.l.mills@shu.ac.uk

Purpose of the Project
The purpose of this study is to look at the issue of cultural identity in academic writing in a second language. The researcher wishes to study the way that international postgraduate students establish their position in the UK university system.

Selection of subjects

The researcher wishes to carry out four case studies with students of four different nationalities who are going on to study a postgraduate degree within the same department. Four students were chosen at random from the pre-sessional students who fitted the criteria.

Procedure
I would like to invite you to participate in my study in two different ways. If you agree, you will have two interviews with the researcher (the first after project 1 and the second after project 2). The researcher will also collect copies of the drafts and final versions of each project. Once you have seen the drafts and given feedback you will need to take an extra photocopy to provide to the researcher. The researcher appreciates that you will be very busy and will try to arrange times for your interviews that are convenient for you.

Data and Confidentiality
The researcher will use a tape recorder to record your interview and then transcribe the whole interview into a written format The researcher will also write up a short report of the research project which you can have upon request.

The data that is collected will be used in a PhD thesis and may also be included in further publications. The names of all of the participants in the study will be changed to preserve anonymity. The data itself will be stored in the Department of Cultural Studies at Sheffield Hallam University and no one, apart from the researcher, will have access to the information.

Withdrawing from the project
Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you are unhappy about taking part in the project in any way you can withdraw. If you do decide to withdraw from the project please contact the researcher by telephone or email to let her know.

Appendix 2

Research Project Information Sheet
(content instructor version)

Contact name: Corinne Boz
Tel: 01189 761306
Email: corinneboz@hotmail.com

About the Researcher
Name: Corinne Boz
Status: Lecturer presently registered as a PhD student at Sheffield Hallam University, School of Cultural Studies.
Name of Supervisor: Professor Sara Mills
Supervisor contact details: Prof. Sara Mills, School of Cultural Studies, Sheffield Hallam University, Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield S10 2Bp; s.l.mills@shu.ac.uk

Purpose of the Project
The purpose of this study is to look at the issue of cultural identity in academic writing in a second language. The researcher wishes to study the way that international postgraduate students establish their position in the UK university system.

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I would like to invite you to participate in my study in two different ways. If you agree, you will have two interviews with the researcher. In addition, the researcher will collect copies of the drafts and final versions of each written assignment. Once you have seen the drafts and given feedback you will need to take an extra photocopy to provide to the researcher. The researcher appreciates that you will be very busy and will try to arrange times for your interviews that are convenient for you.

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The researcher will use a tape recorder to record your interview and then transcribe the whole interview into a written format. A short report of the research project will be made available upon request.

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Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you are unhappy about taking part in the project in any way you can withdraw. If you do decide to withdraw from the project please contact the researcher by telephone or email to let her know.

Appendix 3

Student interview 1 guideline

Objectives

- To gather personal information
- To gather contextual information on academic background i.e. number of years studied etc.
- To discuss previous experience of academic writing in their own language and English
- To discuss their feelings about academic writing
- To discuss work experience and professional writing experience (if any)
- To discuss what they know about academic writing in English
- To discuss expectations of their time at university in the UK
- To discuss their expectations of the pre-sessional course

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1. To gather personal information

    - Name
    - Age
    - Nationality
    - Level of study
    - Department/ area of study

2. To gather contextual information on academic background i.e. number of years studied etc

    - Educational background
        - High school/ undergraduate/ postgraduate/ other
        - Subject
    - Study abroad

3. To discuss previous experience of academic writing in their own language and English

    - Understand the term "academic English"
    - Academic writing at high school (native language and English)

        - Types
        - Foreign teachers
        - Language of reading texts
        - Problems (if any)

- Academic writing at undergraduate level (native language and English)
        - Types
        - Foreign teachers
        - Language of reading texts
        - Problems (if any)

- Academic writing at postgrad level (native language and English)
        - Types
        - Foreign teachers
        - Language of reading texts
        - Problems (if any)

4. To discuss their feelings about academic writing

- Things you feel confident about
- Things you don't feel confident about
- Problems/ difficulties/ previous feedback

5. To discuss work experience and professional writing experience (if any)

- Work experience
- Professional writing

6. To discuss what they know about academic writing in English

- Describe characteristics of good academic writing in English
- Teachers expectations

- Your expectations when you read something

7. To discuss expectations of their time at university in the UK

- Reason for choosing study in the UK
- Aims and objectives
- Areas of difference with previous study experience
- Positive and negative expectations

8. To discuss their expectations of the pre-sessional course

- Reason for taking block 2A of the pre-sessional
- What you know already about it
- Expectations of the course
- Things that will be straightforward about the course
- Things that may be difficult

Appendix 4

Student interview 2 guideline

How do you feel now the first project is over?

Are you happy with the result?

Have you received your final grade?

First draft:

- Tell me why you wrote your first draft this way
- What did your teacher say about your first draft?
- Was it clear to you what your teacher meant?
- How do you feel about the feedback?

Second draft:

- How did you change your second draft?
- Was it easier or more difficult than the first draft?
- What did your teacher say about the second draft?

Final draft:

- How did you feel about the final draft?

What was the most difficult part of the project for you?

Did you feel that you expressed yourself the way that you wanted to? If not, why was this difficult?

Did your teacher talk to you about using personal or subjective language in your project? How do you feel about this?

Was it difficult to express your ideas and the ideas from the sources at the same time?

What did you learn from this project?

What do you think you will do differently in the second project?

Appendix 5

Student interview 3 guideline

Do you feel that your second project was more successful than the first? If so, was this reflected in the grade that you received?

Did you find the process of writing the project easier or more difficult the second time?

Did the fact that you chose your own topic make a difference?

Can you tell me what the most difficult parts of the process were?

Can you tell me what feedback your teacher gave you on your drafts?

Did you agree with the feedback or feel that it was wrong in any way?

How many tutorials did you have?

Did you find it easy to express your ideas in this project?

Do you think you managed to balance your ideas with the materials from the sources?

Do you think your teacher agrees with your opinion on this?

Which part of your project were you most happy with?

What do you think you still need to work on?

Do you feel prepared to write an assignment for your department?

Did you find it easy to write in an academic style? Were there any problems?

What do you think will be the biggest challenges facing you in your department?

Appendix 6

Student final interview guideline

Tell me about your first semester:

Did the course meet your expectations?
Did you find the coursework manageable?
Did you find the reading ok?
Was there anything that you think you were not prepared for or anything that surprised you?

The writing component:
How many assignments were you required to do?
Did you do drafts of this assignment that received feedback from your teacher or did you just submit the final draft?
Did you have any tutorials throughout the semester? If so, what was the main focus?
Did your teacher give you a written description/instructions for your writing assignments or was it just a spoken instruction?

Do you feel that you could approach your teacher to ask about any problems you may be having with the assignment?
Did you use any of the skills you practiced on the Pre-sessional course? Which was the most useful? Which was the least useful?

What problems did you face with your written assignments on this course? How did you overcome them?
Did you find the feedback your teacher gave you useful?
Do you feel that your assignments were better than the ones you did on the Pre-sessional?

Do you feel that you managed to express your ideas the way you wanted to?

What advice would you give to other students from your country who were coming to study here?

Appendix 7

Pre-sessional lecturer interview 1 guideline

Elicit general comments on student's progress in the Project class

How would you define good academic writing?

Did (student's name) achieve good academic writing in their first project?

What did the student find most difficult?

What were the strong points about their project?

What were the biggest problems with the 1st draft, 2nd draft and final draft?

In which areas did (student's name) make the biggest improvement between the first and final drafts?

Did you feel that the author was visible in the first drafts?

Did their presence become clearer in later drafts?

Were their any issues of plagiarism and how did you deal with them?

What is your view on using personal or subjective language in an academic research paper?

Had you discussed this issue specifically with (student's name)?

If they insisted on using personal or subjective language what would you have done; how would you have reacted?

What were the main issues you discussed at tutorials?

What do you think this student really needs to work on?

Appendix 8

Pre-sessional lecturer interview 2 guideline

Do you feel that the second project was an improvement on the first?

In what ways did it differ?

Can you tell me what your main areas of feedback were on the initial drafts?

Do you feel that (student's name) took this feedback into account?

Did (student's name) discuss with you how they felt about the project?

Were there any major problem areas?

Do you feel that there were any communication problems between you?

How did (student's name) deal with integrating sources?

What was your approach to the use of personal language in the second project?

What difficulties do you think (student's name) will face in their department, with regards to their writing?

Any other comments?

Appendix 9

Depatmental lecturer interview guideline

How long have you been teaching here?

How has the student population changed in the time you have been teaching here?

What course do you teach and how are the students assessed?

Do the students do any unassessed writing in your classes?

Do you see draft versions of the students written assignments or do you just see the final version?

Do students receive any feedback on their written work through the semester?

Do you have a written assignmant sheet giving specific details of what is required in their essay?

Do you give the students any explicit instruction on their writing – both L1 and L2 students?

What are the main problems you encounter when grading the students' essays?

How do you deal with these problems?

How do you define good academic writing in English?

Are you flexible on this or are there a fixed set of rules that need to be adhered to?

Do you accept personal language in an academic essay?

How does your grade breakdown work – do you focus more on language or content for example?

If a student has particular problems with language rather than content what do you do?

Can you tell me about (name of student)'s experience of your class?

Was their written assignment what you expected it to be?

(Go through specific areas of feedback on the text).

What issues arose in their essays for you?

Did you discuss their written work with them at any point during the semester?

Do you think (students name) has encountered any problems during the semester?

How do you see the next semester panning out for them?

Do you see a difference between those L2 students who took the Pre-sessional course and those who did not?

Do you know what help is available to the L2 students?