

# 17 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND IDENTITY: RESISTING DOMINANT WAYS OF WRITING AND KNOWING IN ACADEME

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Whenever I tried to write [something] – even my diary, I couldn't write my feelings, opinion and information on my paper. Everything I had huge writing materials in my brain, something that is like a strong guardian seemed to protect the exit gate where my writing material could go out from my brain to on the paper. So this situation made me throw my pencil to the wall strongly or snap it into two. (Excerpt from Seong-jin's free-write logs, ESL student, December 10, 2001)

It was very difficult and time consuming to write three papers which was about 30 pages long per paper. In Korea, a person who can be good at actual translation is more appreciated, rather than the one who is knowledgeable in theory. They focus more on practice than on theory. That's why it was particularly difficult for me to include some theories in my paper. (Interview with Sang-eun, a graduate student in Translation and Interpretation, January 16, 2002)

These excerpts from two South Korean students reflect some of the challenges they encounter in their socialization into North American academic discourses and second language (L2) literacy practices in a new country. Seong-jin,

a twenty-three-year old undergraduate political science student from a South Korean university, enrolled in an intensive English as a Second Language (ESL) program at a Canadian university to improve his English. In the above excerpt from one of his free-write logs, he presents a vivid image of his frustrations with not being able to write when he refers to his symbolic action of throwing the traditional writing tool, his “pencil to the wall strongly.” Sang-eun is a twenty-nine year old graduate student studying for her PhD in Translation Studies at a Canadian university. Before coming to Canada, she had obtained her M.A. degree in Interpretation and Translation in Korean and Spanish from a South Korean university. From her interview excerpt, we infer that her difficulty in writing academic papers, frequently 30-page papers focusing on theory, is influenced by the different discursive emphases in her field of translation studies in both countries.

In this chapter, we draw on case studies of these South Korean students in order to illustrate the challenges international students can face in negotiating new contact zones (Bakhtin, 1981) of competing textualities—zones of contact where they “struggle against various kinds and degrees of authority” (p. 345). These challenges raise questions about writing and knowledge making in academic settings (Canagarajah, 2006a; Hull & Katz, 2006; Matsuda, 2006). Drawing on the late Witte’s (1992) intriguing question about what it means to be able to write in society, we ask what writing can be, especially for international students, who are often discursively labelled as ESL writers or “non-native” writers. As teachers of writing, what are our ethical and professional responsibilities to students like Seong-jin and Sang-eun, who experience conflicting discursive practices for making knowledge? How can we ensure that they are able to write with authority and develop their own writing identities and authorial selves?

To address these questions, we first situate the cases within a brief discussion of international students on Canadian university campuses. We then review prevailing discourses of academic writing for international students, showing how international students have been perceived in the literature in the past. We draw on Bakhtin’s (1981) concepts of authorial activity, and authoritative and internally persuasive discourse to argue for a view of writing as a situated cultural activity that is responsive to the experiences of diverse student populations inhabiting our academic institutions. We conclude that traditionally constructed and attributed labels, such as native/non-native writers or ESL writers need to be challenged for their assumed cultural and linguistic homogeneity of international students and cultural groups. We argue for the reconceptualization of L2 writers and international students within a discourse of possibility (Canagarajah, 2006a; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998; Hull & Katz, 2006) rather than painting portraits of their struggles as deficits and problems.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ON CANADIAN UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

The growing presence of international students from countries where English is not the dominant language raises academic, linguistic, and political questions within North American hosting institutions. Although institutions readily affirm diversity as a desirable and indispensable element of academic excellence, the enrollment of international students is often also seen as a source of revenue for colleges and universities trying to compete in the global marketplace. International students bring foreign capital, increase visible ethnic diversity, and enhance the international reputation of the hosting institutions (Matsuda, 2006). However, international students on Canadian campuses face numerous challenges, which include adapting not only to the country, but also to new educational systems, social relationships, and discursive academic literacy practices. In their socialization into academic discourses, international students are positioned between different cultures and languages. Their perceptions of the academic literacy practices they are expected to appropriate and emulate may differ from those of their North American professors (Hull & Katz, 2006).

### *Prevailing Discourses of Understanding L2 Academic Writers' Challenges*

Over the forty years of L2 composition study, much attention has been given to identifying difficulties encountered by L2 student writers that are attributed to their limited proficiency of the target language (Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Johns, 1990). Some researchers (Jenkins, Jordan, & Weiland, 1993) attribute novice academic writers' difficulties with organization to their lack of clear and logical thinking. Other researchers (Dong, 1998; Smith, 1999) have claimed that students from a Confucian educational background experience difficulties with developing arguments and critical evaluation of theories in the literature since they have presumably been trained not to challenge the ideas and thoughts of their academic superiors. The implication of these studies is that writing instructors should initiate L2 students into the literacy practices of the target cultures, often in English, a language with huge hegemonic power.

However, we view the notion of explicit pedagogy as promoting a one-size-fits-all model for L2 students based on the assumption that international students from similar cultural backgrounds share similar knowledge, beliefs, and values or needs. This over-simplified understanding of socio-cultural influences on L2 writing, stereotypes L2 students as academic writers and neglects the socio-cultural dimensions of their diverse identities. As Kubota (1999) argues, studies in contrastive rhetoric, for example, tend to dichotomize Western and Eastern cultures and draw rigid

cultural boundaries between them. According to Kubota, these studies have given “labels such as individualism, self-expression, critical and analytical thinking and extending knowledge to Western cultures on one hand and collectivism, harmony, indirection, memorization, and conserving knowledge to Asian cultures in general on the other” (p. 14). This reductionistic line of thinking ignores the complexities of L2 students’ diverse identities and knowledge-making processes.

We join with scholars who challenge prevailing assumptions about “English learners” and the cultural and linguistic homogeneity of L2 writers (Canagarajah, 2006a; Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006; Hull & Katz, 2006; Matsuda & Silva, 1999). Accordingly, we see the terms “ESL writers” and “non-native writers” as institutionally constructed and attributed labels. Current theories of difference and deficit cannot explain the difficulties Seong-jin and Sang-eun encountered. L2 researchers therefore need to explore the socio-cultural dimensions of writers and their personal aspirations in academic writing more deeply from the students’ perspectives. We need to reconceptualize how we represent L2 writers without painting portraits of their challenges as deficits. Rather, we need to understand these challenges as struggles with dominant academic discourses.

## UNDERSTANDING THE IDENTITIES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: BETWEEN AUTHORITATIVE AND INTERNALLY PERSUASIVE DISCOURSE

We look to identity theorists from different disciplines that are confronting issues of identity in authoring selves and others. Silverstein (2003) refers to this millennium as the “Era of Anxieties of Identities”:

We hear constantly of crises of identity, of the workings of identity politics, of identity work that needs to be done and so forth. By identity, we can understand a subjective intuition that one belongs to a particular social category of people with certain potentials and consequences of this belonging. This participation suggests participation in ritual occasions and socializing in certain ways in variously institutionalised forms to make our identity clear to ourselves and to others on a continuing basis. This already suggests a kind of temporality to the way identity is and as it were practiced and understood. (pp. 1-2)

Similarly, adopting a hermeneutical conception of identity as a recursive process of self-interpretation, Taylor (1994) links identity to a complex politics of

recognition that refers to something like a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being. To appreciate the complexities of L2 students' challenges and identities in academic literacy practices, we appropriate the discursive construction of identity as an interpretive tool for understanding South Korean international students' challenges. As Ivanič (1998) notes, writing is "an act of identity in which people align themselves with socioculturally shaped possibilities of selfhood, playing their part in reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses, and the values, beliefs and interests which they embody" (p. 31).

To examine this alignment in ways that are respectful of the experiences of diverse student populations in academic settings, we draw on Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism and authoritative and persuasive discourses. Bakhtin's sense of dialogism assumes that the production of utterances always involves the speaker's appropriating, invoking, or ventriloquating through the voices of others, thereby involving the speaker in a dialogic encounter with them. According to Bakhtin, language lies on "the borderline between oneself and another. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (p. 293). For international student writers studying in a North American context, this usually means appropriating the norms of academic writing in English. Individual students may engage in multiple discourses as a consequence of participating in a variety of literacy events and practices (Ivanič, 1998). Thus, appropriation of particular discourse patterns becomes an expression of personal, social, and cultural identities. Students draw on existing macro level discourse structures and resources to create their own locally relevant positionings of self and others (Maguire & Graves, 2001).

Recognizing the dynamism of all texts and the situatedness of all speakers/writers within cultural, historical, and institutional settings, Bakhtin (1981) sees two competing discourses: authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse refers to privileged languages and official discourses, such as official government policy and legislation, the discourse of tradition, generally acknowledged beliefs and authority that cannot be disrupted. Internally persuasive discourse refers to everyday discourse that constantly changes in social interactions. It is the discourse of personal beliefs, values, and ideas that influence our responses to the world and others and allows for negotiation. The two discourses can co-exist and create socio-political tensions between languages and power, texts and power, self and others. When international student writers are engaged in learning authoritative discourses in North American academic contexts, they may experience conflicts derived from the

power relationships between the new authoritative discourse of others and their internally persuasive discourses as authoring selves. Regardless of a teacher's explicit instruction about cultural knowledge of a target discourse, some students may choose not to appropriate that knowledge because it conflicts with their preferred internally persuasive discourses (Lee, 2005). Some students might accommodate themselves rather easily to the conventions and expectations in a particular academic discourse community. Others might not be willing to compromise how they position themselves in order to become a member of the authoritative discourse communities.

To understand this phenomenon of writer alignment, we present Seong-jin and Sang-un as case examples of what international students may be trying to accomplish as they negotiate academic literacy practices in two Canadian universities.

## METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In this interpretive, qualitative inquiry, we examine two South Korean students' experiences of their academic literacy practices in Canadian universities, focusing in particular on their negotiation processes with complex social relations inside and outside their school settings. We do not intend to produce any generalizations about international students in Canadian universities. The two cases serve as entry points into the conversation about discursive identity, positioning, and knowledge making embedded in the L2 literacy practices of international students. An interpretive methodology assumes an epistemological stance that human beings are self interpretive beings and agents in various social contexts.

The primary source of data is the students' personal narratives that emerged from open-ended interviews. The face-to-face, open-ended interviews were conducted in Korean from November 2001 until April 2002 and audiotaped. Interviews were transcribed in both Korean and English, but Korean excerpts are not included in this chapter due to the lack of space. Various sets of data that are relevant to the participants' narratives were also collected, such as writing samples of course work, personal notes and e-mails, administrative documents, research journals, and observation notes of various social activities.

### *Situating the Participants*

Seong-jin and Sang-eun, born in South Korea and raised in Korean families, have experienced the South Korean national education systems up to post-secondary school. Seong-jin came to Canada by himself in September 2001 when

he was twenty-three years old; this was his first time abroad. He postponed his studies in political science in a Korean B.A. degree program in order to enroll in an intensive ESL program offered at an English-speaking Canadian university. According to the ESL program's web site, the official goal of the intensive course was to help students develop English language skills for academic or professional purposes. Seong-jin received financial support from his parents in Korea to cover tuition fees and accommodation. He was very conscious about how much money he spent on his ESL studies since the main source of income for his family was his father's salary as a civil servant. Seong-jin was living with a Canadian homestay family and two other roommates.

Sang-eun came to Canada in 1999 with her husband to pursue her PhD degree in the Department of Translation and Interpretation at a Canadian university. She had obtained her Bachelor's and Master's degree in Translation, majoring in Korean and Spanish, from a Korean university with a reputation as a very prestigious school in her field in Korea. After finishing the M.A. program, she worked for a short while as a professional translator. She then decided to pursue her PhD degree in the translation field. Her Canadian university offered her an admission scholarship covering tuition for four years.

In the next section, we analyze the challenges Seong-jin's and Sang-eun face as "newcomers" to academic literacy practices at Canadian universities.

## SEONG-JIN'S CHALLENGES: DEVELOPING A NEW IDENTITY AS AN ACADEMIC WRITER

Seong-jin's case illustrates his challenges negotiating the authoritative discourse, the normative ways of academic essay writing, and his internally persuasive discourse that emerged from his free-writes in his early ESL class. The intensive ESL program in which Seong-jin was enrolled in a Canadian university placed students in five different levels of language skills: low- and high-beginner, low- and high-intermediate, and advanced. During the period of interviews from November 2001 until April 2002, he took three semesters of the intensive ESL program. In the 2001 fall term, he was placed in the high-beginner level of English. He then moved to the high-intermediate level in the 2002 winter term and to the advanced level in the 2002 spring term. At the beginner and intermediate levels, Seong-jin engaged in many free-writing tasks in his classes, which led him to regard writing as an important part of his identity and to explore his internally persuasive discourse.

From the beginning of the interviews with Seong-jin, it was evident that he was studying English extremely hard and doing so mostly through reading

Harry Potter. He spent about five hours a day studying English, reading and memorizing vocabulary from the book. His approach to learning English is reflected in this excerpt from his free-writing on the word “strong,” a prompt provided by his ESL teacher:

“Strong?” What does this word – “strong” mean? What is that “strong”. These questions have preyed on my mind for long time, specially after ‘the accident in the elementary school’. I was just at the age of 12 or 13 years old. I got to be sprawled out on the floor, having mouth and nose bleeding, and lots of bruises all over my body after many classmates pummelled me because I was a new student to their class from another school ... Then I asked myself about “strong” and decided to be strong ... so to become strong man, I was extremely interested in the fighting skills—the boxing, Takwon-do, judo etc.... but I just learned only one kind of fighting skill – boxing and a little.... Oneday I knew the strength on my mind is more important and just physical power is a part of various aspects that the real strong man must have ... I hope that oneday I stood confidently and powerfully in front of millions of people and lead them. Then maybe I will not aspire to be the strong man any more.

The title ‘Strong’ can be traced to a childhood incident in elementary school in which he was “pummelled by his classmates.” He vividly produces an image of his being “sprawled on the floor, having mouth and nose bleeding and lots of bruises all over [his] body.” In response to the experience, he aspires to become a strong man and to be “self confident and powerful in front of millions of people” by strengthening his physical power as well as his mind.

We find it intriguing that Seong-jin has the desire to have the “strength on my mind” in addition to building physical strength. The next interview excerpt reflects how he links “the strength on my mind” specifically to writing:

I think ... there are many people who speak well but not many who write well. I believe that a person who writes well is the one who thinks deeply. In my view, if you want to be a better person and a deeper thinking person, it is important to write well. (Seong-jin, interview, February 1, 2002)

Seong-jin portrays himself as an individual who highly values the linguistic capital of writing as a key to being a “better person and a deeper thinking



person.” In the next excerpt, he even emphasizes writing as the most important thing he learned in Canada:

Everyone have been in foreign countries said to me, I would feel value of country and value of family. If I felt values like that, there would be the most important thing I've learned in Canada so far. But unfortunately I have not had that feelings ... Most important thing is for me in [this] class, specially in writing class. Maybe because of shame, timid ... I could not read my writing. But it's truth. I didn't like writing. Never! Despite I wanted to write novel, opinion and a letter very well, always something prevented my brain from moving actively.... I know writing is very hard, long journey. To write well need to read many books and practice much time. But It's not problem for me ... I keep going to read and write writings. Someday I will make popular novel like 'Harry Potter' composed by Joanne Rowling and nice report about my major. I believe. I dream a dream like Martin Luther King.

Seong-jin's autobiographical self continues to emerge as he reiterates how he values good writing skills and aspires to be a good writer for his ESL class and in his future pursuits. Interestingly, this free-write excerpt reveals that he is passionate about producing creative writing and what he perceives as good writing is a novel such as Harry Potter. This writing disposition is not one we would have likely predicted from the first projected image of this “studying hard student,” which he presented in his first interview.

The next excerpt entitled “Music” strongly reflects his potential as a creative writer—an image that is affirmed by his teacher's response to this log.

I am extremely thirsty. Eagerly diving into cold, blue, infinite sea [ ... ] I can drink all water till the bottom [ ... ] I need not sea. Just I can be satisfied with a bottle of coke [ ... ] What is this thirst to me? Why do I feel fever on my chest [ ... ] I am just standing, seeing absent-mindedly, stretching arms without strength. I am wearing good suit. I have aspiration. I hope someone is being next to me. I can recline my head against someone's shoulders, and someone can recline head against my shoulders. I don't know someone is my friend or my lover. But if we stood on the street between people, we would not feel alone [ ... ] What will I do? [ ... ] For what and who will I live? [

... ] Let me believe myself. Let me love my family. Let me help wretched people. Let my people think me valuable. Let me soar to the sky. Let me have brightness of sun. Let me fly away to sun. Let me see opposite side of moon.

Here is the teacher's comment

This is wonderful—like a poem. Maybe you should write it that way (in the form of a poem). I can see that you really know how to put your imagination, your mind on paper. Sometimes, we call free writing “mind writing”. You do a really good job of that. You’ve done a great job describing the freedom of a wondering mind. Sometimes we also call this “stream of consciousness” writing.

However, in the following semester, Seong-jin advanced to the high-intermediate level class. In this class, he struggled with two conflicting discourses—the authoritative discourse of normative ways of writing an academic essay required in his ESL class and his internally persuasive discourse that had emerged in his previous ESL class.

According to Seong-jin, since the high-intermediate class was a more advanced level class, the focus of the instruction was more geared toward English for academic purposes. During this semester he occasionally talked about his difficulty in participating in the class. Unlike the free-writes he had enjoyed in the previous course, he found it very difficult to write an essay in a formal academic style, such as a reading response or an argumentative essay. His identity and aspirations to be a creative writer often contradicted the expectations of the formal writing conventions he was expected to appropriate in this ESL class.

The next excerpts from a reading response Seong-jin wrote in this ESL class and his teacher's comment illustrate the tensions between his internally persuasive discourse and the authoritative discourse norms of the ESL class.

Willam Cowan! I can easily guess what your job is. Surely your job is professional, maybe mathematician. If my guess is wrong, anyway you're very thorough person because anyone doesn't think carefully why we're not using metric measuring in only time measurement [ ... ] It is great! Especially, your suggestion that a day begin at sunrise, 0:00 o'clock and a year begins at the time when the day begins longer or shorter, are fabulously ingenious. I can't find proper way to praise your peculiar

thought, efforts to form a theory and result, “This hour has 100 minutes.” But to complete your theory not just interesting article but a practical provocative power, you had to give audiences the reasons why we must change present time structure into new [ ... ] I don’t understand metric time measuring is natural? I don’t think so because metric measurement was also invented by human being [ ... ] Have you ever thought why metric time measuring is revolutionary comfortable even though enormous cost to change? [ ... ] I will give some examples against yours. Have you ever heard about salary man’s Monday disease? [ ... ] Monday disease is about tiredness and laziness that salary man suffers from usually after holidays. Let’s guess to adopt you’re a three-day work period with two days off. Salary man would be supposed to suffer from twice Monday disease a week and this would affect the economy seriously. [ ... ] If I had read your theory in those, I would have thanked you to expand my thinking. But I was sorry that I read yours in the class and had to respond my opinion for or against yours [ ... ] Before finishing my writing, I will give you fantastic idea to make your theory more superior. Make your theory easier and clearer, then issue it in the scientific book or magazine of teenagers .... (Seong-jin, reading response, January 28, 2002)

Here is the teacher’s comment

Leo (Seong-jin’s nick name in the ESL class), this article is only a proposal. When you write your critique, you should not address the writer. You have to keep it more neutral, you have to write about the article and about the author and about his theory...

...Tone down your sarcasm. This paper looks more like a political satire than a reading response. A reading response is an academic paper, where a sound argument is valued more than an emotional outburst.

This exchange shows Seong-jin’s struggles balancing the ‘authoritative discourse’ of this ESL class and the ‘internally persuasive discourse’ of his free writes. He feels forced to appropriate the authoritative discourse and to engage in the formal academic writing practices as instructed by his ESL teacher. He is

told to tone down his sarcasm, not to dialogue with the writer, to keep his tone neutral and just to write about the article and the author and his theory. The values of this authoritative discourse are explicit in the teacher's response to his response paper: "A reading response paper is an academic paper where a sound argument is valued more than an emotional outburst."

The next excerpt reveals that Seong-jin was aware of the institutional norms for what constitutes a good writing sample of an argumentative essay in this ESL class:

Seong-jin: I like writing based on my intuition. I don't like writing based on logic and by adding references. There always has to be a fixed structure. You have to write "a positive argument with example sentences" first, and then "a negative argument with example sentences." At the end, then, you have to come up with "solution" stating what is the best argument. This is sort of what they consider as a good writing sample.

Heekyeong: So, you know then what they expect from your writing.

Seong-jin: Yeah, but I don't like to do that. It [my writing] becomes then the same as all the other students'. I don't like to follow the same form as others ....(Interview with Seong-jin, February 15, 2002)

Seong-jin's awareness of the norms may have been reinforced by his identity as a hard-working ESL student who wanted to achieve high marks from the course. Before he experienced the free-writes in his previous ESL writing class, this may indeed have worked for him. However, he now valued the internally persuasive discourse of his free-writes, which may have been influenced by his aspirations to become a creative writer and his former writing teacher's affirmation of his authorial self. He believed that writing should be produced intuitively rather than by focusing on form and structure. Struggling to find his own identity as a writer, he did not want to implement the rules for writing an argumentative essay that he was certainly aware of because he felt his writing would be "the same as all the other students" work. He resisted becoming a writing clone and did not like writing based on "logic and by adding references." This belief seemed to be so strong that it prevented Seong-jin from producing an argumentative essay for his ESL class. Understandably, it took much time for him to finish one essay for his homework. Furthermore, he started to skip class frequently, particularly when he did not complete the homework assignment:

I feel I have become a dummy. I can't make points in an academic writing ... The unfinished homework is piling up. I know I tend to write based on my feelings ... but I can't write if I don't come up with any feeling. (Seong-jin, interview, February 1, 2002)

So, one day, I tried to write an essay in the free writing style. I was of course able to quickly write one and a half pages. But, even to me it did not look coherent at all. I tried to write it again a few days later, but decided to give up. After that, I did not go to the class and studied in the library by myself instead. (Seong-jin, interview, February 15, 2002)

As this interview excerpt indicates, Seong-jin's sense of self had shifted from that of a self-confident writer with aspiration to be a creative writer to that of someone who felt like a "dummy" and inarticulate in academic writing.

Seong-jin's dilemma provides a good example of the salience of the dialectical tensions between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses in understanding a student's frustration as a novice academic writer. As Canagarajah (2006b) argues, "not every instance of non-standard usage by a student is an unwitting error: sometimes it is an active choice motivated by important cultural and ideological considerations" (p. 609). In Seong-jin's case, two contradictory discourses are both equally dominant and one suppresses the other. This internal conflict appeared to paralyse and prevent him from completing his homework assignment. Since he viewed "writing well" as an important means to become a "good," "wise," and "strong" person, he became traumatized by the fact that he was not able to write. Writing in an academic context, then, may be a site of struggle for students to meet the demands of teacher's instructions at the local classroom level.

## SANG-EUN'S CHALLENGES: STRUGGLES BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND PERSONAL VISION

Sang-eun's challenge involves a very pragmatic issue many graduate students face: choosing a dissertation topic and an appropriate supervisor. Her struggles between her personal vision of a dissertation topic and the institutional policy of finding a dissertation supervisor in the department point to more institutional systemic tensions.

Sang-eun had obtained her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Korean and Spanish Translation in South Korea. The Canadian university where she had

chosen to pursue her PhD studies in Translation and Interpretation is an official English/French bilingual academic institution. As a bilingual academic institution, this university requires students to have proficiency in at least one of the two official languages and some knowledge of the other. Students are allowed to produce their work and answer examination questions either in English or in French—in whichever language they feel most comfortable. Since her language proficiency in French was not very strong, Sang-eun chose English as her main language in which to carry out her academic tasks, such as completing her course work and writing her dissertation proposal.

Upon her arrival, Sang-eun had received an admission scholarship covering a four-year tuition fee. As she became more familiar with the program, however, she was confronted with different expectations than she had anticipated. As reflected in the interview excerpt below, she became aware that the academic discourse of her Canadian PhD program was different from that of her MA program in Korea:

It was very difficult and time consuming to write three papers which was about 30 pages long per paper. In Korea, a person who can be good at actual translation is more appreciated, rather than the one who is knowledgeable in theory. They focus more on practice than on theory. That's why it was particularly difficult for me to include some theories in my paper. (Interview with Sang-eun, January 16, 2002)

Sang-eun's difficulty was to include a theoretical analysis in her course papers and to balance theoretical arguments with her own. This difficulty may have been influenced by the academic literacy practices in her MA program in Korea as she thought that theory would not be very useful when she would look for a job in Korea in the future. Noticing the difference between her PhD programs' emphasis on theory and her need for a more practical approach, Sang-eun became frustrated about choosing her dissertation topic and writing her proposal authoritatively from her subject position.

Additionally, because of the nature of the field of translation studies, Sang-eun had to find a supervisor with a good knowledge of the target languages she was interested in. Unfortunately, no professor in her program had expertise in Korean, which made her choice of a dissertation topic more difficult. As revealed in the following interview excerpt, she was aware of the pros and cons as well as of the political consequences of different choices:

Sang-eun: It's because there is no one who can be my supervi-

sor since my mother tongue is Korean. There is no one who can supervise for Korean language. Nevertheless, I can still do my research on the context of Korean language, under the condition that either I find a Korean supervisor by myself or they do not have to find a Korean supervisor for me.

Heekyeong: So, your PhD thesis would be ...

Sang-eun: Yeah, I can do in Korean and English or English and Spanish. However, due to my mother tongue, I will probably be doing in Korean and English.

Heekyeong: I see ... Do you feel more confident with English than Spanish?

Sang-eun: No, that's not why. There is no market for Korean and Spanish [in this field].

Heekyeong: Oh, is that right?

Sang-eun: Yeah, so if you want to do research, the result of research should be something useful in the field, so, I believe that the work on English and Korean is more useful in Korea [than the one on English and Spanish]. Also, it is not meaningful for me to do research on Korean and Spanish ... (Interview with Sang-eun, November 7, 2001)

In February of 2002, at the end of the second year of her PhD studies, Sang-eun became more frustrated because she had not yet come up with a clear idea for her dissertation. She could not find a supervisor who had the linguistic expertise to work with Korean texts. It became increasingly clear to her that it would neither be good nor feasible for her to have a Korean context in her thesis. She felt that her department did not seem welcoming to her case, nor could they support her financially if she chose to work with Korean. The next interview excerpt reflects tension in Sang-eun's struggle between her personal vision of her dissertation topic, the institutional policy, and the availability of professors in the department.

Sang-eun: The other day I spoke to the director of the program about my thesis topic. She suggested I should work on English,

French or Spanish contexts so that they can support me.

Heekyeong: Why don't you then work on English or Spanish contexts?

Sang-eun: Then, my uniqueness will disappear and thus, it will be difficult for me to get some funding ... I thought about writing my thesis related to 'Terminology' field, but terminology itself is not considered as a specialized field in Korea, unlikely here. (Interview with Sang-eun, February 27, 2002)

Due to the difficulties in finding a supervisor for her PhD thesis, Sang-eun even thought of transferring to an MA program since many of her colleagues seemed to continue what they had done in their MA program. However, she decided to discard the idea because she would lose her scholarship if she changed her program.

Furthermore, Sang-eun felt marginalized as the "only Asian in the department." This led her to reflect further on her dilemma and her sense of self:

In my case, I am the only Asian in the department. There is one Arabic student and she says to me that she is proud of being Arabic. I don't mean that I am not proud of being Korean. I mean because of the fact (being Korean) there are many disadvantages for me ... So, I feel that this is not a right school for me, it's not a place I should stay. I don't mean that they [people in the department] did something wrong to me. What can they do, this is a bilingual school, which is funded by the government of which English and French are the main languages ... I think I should go somewhere what I can do can be appreciated. (Sang-eun, interview, April 24, 2002)

This excerpt reveals that Sang-eun considered another academic institution to pursue her doctoral studies: "I should go somewhere what I can do can be appreciated." This need to find an alternative space for her work seems to have emerged when she realized that she could not negotiate any further with her current academic institution. Embarking on PhD studies presents students with many challenges, most importantly making life choices about what research communities they aspire to embrace and with whom they want to align themselves. In this institutional context, we can infer that there are no textual possibilities for Sang-eun to realize her vision of her dissertation.



## REFLECTIVE UNDERSTANDINGS OF TEXTUAL POSSIBILITIES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

We return to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter: What are our ethical and professional responsibilities as educators in responding to the needs, goals, and expectations of international students? What should authorial activity look like in post secondary academic institutions as our student populations become increasingly diverse? What kinds of textual possibilities can institutions envision for international students? We reflect on some implications from the cases of these two South Korean international students' challenges and negotiations between their internally persuasive discourses and those of their Canadian institutions.

What we draw from these two cases is the need to challenge the frequently ascribed labels, such as "non-native" writers, and to understand how the identities of international students can be better appreciated, recognized, and respected. We believe that writers' texts offer glimpses into how they are positioning themselves and establishing their points of reference as they appropriate or resist prevailing discourses. As engaging in multiple discourses, these students construct their identities and negotiate how to make others' words their own (Bakhtin, 1981). The re-accenting and re-voicing involved in this negotiation does not mean that teachers reformulate their utterances with a correct linguistic construction in the right language—usually English. We do not envision this re-accenting and re-voicing process in classrooms as exercises in reformulating, repeating, and memorizing the well formed utterances of others. Rather, engaging in L2 writing activities and processes offers textual possibilities for enacting a self. Seong-jin's and Sang-eun's narratives about writing within the academy illustrate that, during the processes of appropriating the authoritative discourses of their North American academic institutions, these students were constantly organizing and reorganizing their sense of being and how they were relating to their social worlds. They were experiencing what Bakhtin (1981) calls the process of "ideologically becoming," which refers to the process of "distinguishing between one's own and another's discourse, between one's own and another's thought" (p. 345).

The appropriation of a new discourse is not simply a matter of picking up new information or new discursive practices as new ways of knowledge-making. For some international students in their study-abroad contexts, this can mean appropriating new ontological and epistemological assumptions that can be very different from those they have previously held in their home schools and communities (Lee, 2005). Accordingly, they may need to create new positionings and dialectical relationships between their performances and their wider socio-political and economic contexts (Lee, 2007).

Bakhtin (1981) acknowledges that experiencing the power struggles among different discourses is an uneasy process: "Our ideological development is just such

an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values” (p. 345). Seong-jin struggled with the process of appropriating authoritative discourses introduced by his ESL teacher. Sang-eun experienced tensions between the conflicting demands of her academic institution and professors and her project of selfhood. Both students felt that they might lose the internally persuasive discourses with which they felt comfortable and believed to be good for their textual performance. However, new authoritative discourses forced them to cross the borders between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses and to position themselves in ways that may exclude them from participating in knowledge-making practices. So, who is responsible for these tensions? What are the responsibilities of teachers when such tensions arise? Certainly, teaching international students to write solely a North American normative text is not the answer.

Rather, these two cases call for a re-examination of hegemonic approaches that have become normative ways of framing, representing, and describing “English Learners” and their learning challenges from a deficit view. Considerations of explicit pedagogy or mimetic teaching approaches for L2 students seem to operate from the assumption that international students from similar cultural backgrounds share similar knowledge, beliefs, morals, and values. As Kubota (2001) argues, such assumptions lead to the ‘othering’ of ESL students by stereotyping their cultures and languages, and they presume the existence of the unproblematic ‘Self’ of European/ Western images of power relations that engender feelings of superiority or inferiority. Framing “English Learners” as a distinct group of students who are somehow different from an invisible and mostly unspecified but assumed mainstream norm by using ethnic labels, pan-ethnic labels (Asian), or national-origin labels (e.g., Korean) results in reifying essentialized uni-dimensional categorical concepts of identity (Gutierriz & Orellana, 2006).

Many educators and policy makers may erroneously assume that international students are struggling because they do not know or do not understand the expectations of academic discourse in North American academic institutions. This may lead teachers to feel it is their duty to explicitly teach a particular set of textual expectations. In her 2004 Richard Braddock Award article, Lu (2004) stresses that we, as educators, need to delay our assessment of what novice writers need and how they need to use English until we have studied their understanding of ways of writing. This understanding includes the interpretive process involved in one’s efforts to map the actual discursive resources of individual students. Seong-jin’s and Sang-eun’s narratives show that they had developed the meta-cognitive awareness and self-reflexivity that enabled them to understand implicit expectations of academic discourse for their success in their academic programs. While they were struggling, they were in fact very aware of what was required in their course work

to receive a good grade. However, what was required conflicted with their internally persuasive discourses. Their struggling has more to do with the influence of oppressive normative expectations and systemic influences on their writing rather than with not knowing those expectations.

Seong-jin and Sang-eun's challenges reflect international students' options for making choices for their future life trajectories when crossing borders. Unfortunately, both students' academic institutions did not respond to their needs, expectations and aspirations. A commitment to diversity and multiculturalism, which is one of the primary principles of Canadian higher education, is much more than simply having an adequate representation of international students among the student body. Rather, as Paré (2005) notes, "a critical reflection on language holds the possibility of enormous and fundamental change" (p. 88). This commitment inevitably means openness to change and requires systemic strategies and transformative programs that help everyone adopt a critical approach to texts and power (Paré, 2005) that offers new possibilities for addressing the questions raised in this chapter: What kinds of selves, writers, people are we asking international students to become when they inhabit our academic institutions and engage in authorial activities? In classrooms? In communities? In society? How can international students write with authority?

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