



**MONASH** University

**Chinese postgraduate students’  
English academic writing in Australia:  
Negotiating practices and identities**

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## **Abstract**

China ‘sends’ the largest numbers of overseas students to English-speaking countries – such as the US, Canada, the UK, and Australia – to pursue their studies in higher education. A recent study estimates that numbers of Chinese students studying in these countries will continue to increase by 3.9% per annum for the next ten years (British Council, 2014). And yet, as second language researcher-writers still developing their confidence and profiles as researchers in their chosen cognate field in Australia, Chinese postgraduate students encounter particular challenges and difficulties in developing their English academic writing. At the global level, this has implications both for the reputation of Australia as a favoured destination of these Chinese postgraduate students and for the development of knowledge globally through such international mobility arrangements. Ethically, it also has implications for the experience of each individual student coming to study and research in Australia.

This research project looks at how the Chinese postgraduate students from different disciplines learn to write in English in different academic contexts in Australian universities. The broad aims of this qualitative study are: (a) to investigate how Chinese postgraduate students in Australia write in English in universities and develop identities; and (b) to identify factors that mediate their identity negotiation, in order that these students might be better supported and resourced by universities.

Underpinned by Bakhtin’s dialogic theory, this study reports on and analyzes the complexity and nuances of the English academic writing experiences of five Chinese research students. The research design brings together a case study approach with narrative-based inquiry methods. The participants of the study included four Chinese postgraduate students who were enrolled in research degrees in Australian universities. The students responded to an initial questionnaire about their experiences of English academic writing. This was followed up with a series of extended semi-structured interviews and, in some instances, additional email conversations. In these dialogic interactions, I inquired into and examined their English scholarly writing practices and researcher-writer identity negotiation. I situated myself as a fifth participant in this study, since I too am a Chinese postgraduate student enrolled in a research degree in a university in Melbourne. In place of interviews with myself, I provide a range of critically reflexive writing about my experiences of developing my academic writing

in English, including a preamble and a separate narrative case study chapter investigating my own experiences.

The study shows the dynamic and dialogic nature of English academic writing practices that the five participants enacted, highlighting the complex and nuanced way in which they negotiated their researcher-writer identity in what I describe – after Bauman (2004) and Gee (2000-1) – as their ‘identity work’. I identify four categories of dialogue in their English academic writing: 1) interpersonal dialogue; 2) intrapersonal dialogue; 3) intertextual dialogue; and 4) intratextual dialogue. Noting the uncertain and unpredictable nature of the different dialogic interactions of the five participants, I show how all five of us have been engaged in writing practices characterized by recursivity, reflection and negotiation during our postgraduate studies in Australia.

Secondly, the study shows several similarities and differences with regard to the Chinese researcher-writer identity work that the participants engaged in. Based on the stories told by the Chinese postgraduate students about how they negotiated their researcher-writer identity, I show how different factors influenced and mediated the ways they negotiated their cultural and academic identity in English writing. I analyze many possible factors from two provisionally separable perspectives: (i) ‘non-academic’ voices and perspectives; and (ii) ‘academic’ voices and perspectives. The study shows that these factors do not exist in isolation. Rather, they are dynamically and dialogically interrelated, resulting in a complex researcher-writer identity.

These findings have implications for better understanding English academic/research writing, especially regarding the dialogic nature of interaction activities and researcher-writer identity work in the process of writing. This study generates valuable knowledge, in the first instance, through its situated and theorized stories of the day-to-day experiences of Chinese postgraduate researchers enrolled in English-speaking university contexts. It also draws attention to the need for reform in the ways supervisors and universities support the work of international graduate research students, paying greater attention to the importance of the students’ identity work as researcher-writers and also better supporting these students’ participation in a range of dialogic research spaces and interactions.

## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no materials which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or any other educational institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previous published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature.

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The plan for this research was approved by the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (Reference: CF11/0560-2011000241)

## **Dedication**

My Beloved Parents,

My Husband Shuaiwei Li and My Son Melvin Li

For all their love and support to my PhD thesis journey

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Completing this doctoral program in my second language has been a challenging, but satisfying journey. I want to express my deepest gratitude to many people, who have been with me, and from whom I benefit in so many ways.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CEE	College Entrance Examination
CET	College English Test
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ILT	Intercultural Language Teaching
L1	First (or Home) Language
L2	Second Language
NLS	New Literacy Studies
SCT	Socio-Cultural Theory
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
UK	United Kingdom
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

## **PART ONE: INTRODUCTION**

## **Preamble**

Becoming a writer is a complex and ongoing process. (Kroll, 1990, p. 1)

Before I came to Australia, I worked as a teacher of English in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for a short while teaching Chinese students to prepare writing exam in IELTS. One day, some students in my class asked me a very interesting question: “How can you talk about writing, such a boring and difficult thing, in such a passionate and exciting way?” I did not have to pause before answering: “Writing for me is just like playing a game...practicing, learning the rules, learning how to apply them, more practically for a range of different purposes in a range of settings...”

I am a passionate English writer. I enjoy writing in both academic and personal settings. I feel so lucky to be able to have been doing a PhD focused on teaching and learning English academic writing in an Australian university. Before coming to Australia, I had spent my whole life in China. Mandarin is my mother tongue. I began to learn English at the age of 12 as a junior middle school student. Since junior middle school, I have had lots of writing experiences both in English and in Chinese. All of these writing experiences have been important in my study of Chinese postgraduate students’ experiences of, and attitudes toward, writing in English. That helps explain why I have positioned myself as both the researcher and participant in this study, and why my ‘case’ of developing English academic writing in postgraduate contexts (Chapter 5) is a crucial dimension of my narrative-based case study. This Preamble teases out in more detail some of my personal and academic history leading up to undertaking this PhD project in 2010.

### **My English language study and writing experiences in China**

I always loved writing in Chinese as a child. As well as completing tasks for school, I also wrote in my own journal, and I read widely. These two sorts of activities - reading extensively and keeping a journal - played a significant role in raising my writing motivation and improving my writing ability. As for reading, there is an old Chinese saying, “熟读唐诗三百首，不会作诗也会吟”，which means ‘Keep reading the three hundred Tang poems until you are familiar with them, and you will be able to make, if not compose, poetry’. As I say, my reading was quite extensive. I liked exploring different areas of knowledge, and I never limited my focus



merely to what I was directed to read by the teachers at school. Gradually, I developed my own knowledge and skills base for reading and became acquainted with different Chinese writing genres, which laid a solid foundation for my later writing.

As I grew up, I continued to keep writing in my journal. I was passionate about this kind of personal, non-threatening writing because I did not have to worry about mistakes in terms of language or ideas. In most cases, I just scribbled notes. Sometimes, I even drew something on the pages. All of this writing has become for me a valuable record of my happiness and sadness, my laughter and tears, and my daily life through my whole childhood. I have come to recognize, through completing this PhD study, that my writing in this journal greatly helped my development as a writer in Chinese.

I started my English language study, in a formal sense, in junior secondary school in China. My first close encounter with the English language took place when I was 12 years old. I have a vague memory of being deeply fascinated by the magical sounds and amazing rhythms of English when our teacher read an English text to us for the first time. I was curious as well as excited about this beautiful language. However, at that time, I was being educated within a traditional teacher-centered and grammar-oriented pedagogy, which I am sorry to say dampened some of my enthusiasm for learning English. The teachers urged me and my peers to focus on memorizing grammatical rules and doing numerous grammatical exercises. I was frustrated learning English in this way. However, in retrospect, I can see some benefits from these traditional teaching methods for English writing in the years to come. It helped me build a considerable linguistic repertoire and develop relatively satisfactory grammatical skills.

Through those early years learning English, needless to say I continued to pursue my Chinese writing practices. But also I continued to read widely in English and I kept a journal in English. If anything, I read much more extensively in English than I did in Chinese. I had a notebook which I carried with me wherever I went. During my free time, I would immerse myself in reading all manner of different styles of English writing. Sometimes I tried to memorize an English paragraph or a passage, which I thought to be useful or beautiful. All this reading and writing in English outside of school must have helped my development as a writer and reader of English. My more traditional teachers were satisfied; I was able to gain high grades in my English essays. At that time, I suspect that my main motivation in writing in English was the sense of academic achievement it offered me. However, I have to admit that I did not feel any

great passion for English writing at school during these times. Most of the writing practices we engaged in at school were oriented toward preparing us for the College Entrance Examination (CEE), which meant that both the teacher and the students paid more attention to the sentence-level grammar correctness and linguistic accuracy. We were expected to write following a set of prescribed rigid templates and I rarely had opportunities in school to write in English freely and creatively, as I was accustomed to write in my journal.

This situation lasted until I met a young English teacher – I will call her ‘Mary’<sup>1</sup> – in my university in China. Fortunately, her teaching approach was very lively and flexible. In retrospect, I realize that she mainly adopted the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) pedagogy in her class. Rather than merely explaining the uninspiring and outdated English readers we were required to read, she organized various activities in classes, such as performing role-plays, holding debates, reading English poems and newspapers, and so forth. She would surround and immerse us in the target language, and she encouraged us to put our emerging abilities in English into practical use wherever possible. Because of her, my true inspiration for writing was reignited. I no longer felt I had to follow a rigid set of rules or templates. Rather, I was allowed to deviate from those so-called ‘standard expressions’, and to draw on my imagination and creativity in expressing myself through writing.

I remember in one English class, Mary encouraged us to write a poem. I was so excited to have a try even though I did not know much about poetry writing. At that time, I was sad that one of my close friends was about to transfer to another school. I decided to write a poem to express how I treasured our friendship. I spent several minutes allowing some ideas for what I wanted to say in my poem to float around my mind. In the following minutes – I can’t remember how long it took – I began to integrate a range of feelings, emotions as well as sensations into my writing. Following are a few stanzas of the poem I wrote in that class, which I still have on the hard drive of the computer I used at university then:

*My dear friend, please do not cry,  
because we never say goodbye.  
My dear friend, please do not be beyond my sight,  
because being with you is my only desire.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary is a pseudonym.

*If you want to fly in the sky,  
I will wait for you in the late night.  
When you feel homesick and tired,  
I will stay here to offer you the bright light.*

*When the bright lines blind your eyes,  
when you feel it goes all unsatisfied,  
remember you are not alone,  
I will be forever on your side.*

Composing this poem was an extremely important experience in my journey of learning to write in English. Perhaps for the very first time, I got a sense of deep satisfaction from writing in English. Writing stimulated me to express myself without any concerns about formulaic conventions or prescriptions. I felt that English writing was so close to me that I could relate to it on a personal level.

### **Affective and intellectual English writing practices in my MEd study**

Writing in two tongues is like a two-edged knife. If one can handle it skillfully, one can achieve many purposes; otherwise one will cut oneself. (Le Ha & Viete, 2007, p.13)

After four years of undergraduate study in China, I came to Australia to pursue a Master's degree, specializing in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). I have always considered myself an adaptable person. I can be flexible and adapt to new situations I am confronted by. Thus, I did not feel it would be very difficult for me to adjust to studying in Australia, and reading and writing in English. As a Master of Education student, writing was an essential component in my course assessments. I still remember the experience of writing my first assignment. I was required to write a report about the teacher's and the students' behaviors in an English-for-academic-purposes classroom I had recently observed. This was to outline my own perceptions of a 'good English class'. The first distinctive impression stamped into my mind of writing in an Australian university was that the writing tasks assigned by lecturers tended to value students' individual perceptions as well as experiences. As Marcia Dickson (1995) expresses it, such tasks "place[d] students in a position of authority that

negate[d] their lack of general knowledge about academic subjects” (p. 4). Although I was unfamiliar with this writing genre, I went about preparing for my first assignment with a high motivation on the grounds that this kind of writing allowed my personal views to become far more significant than the impersonal description or discussion of those bigger issues.

For the purpose of making up what I perceived as ‘deficits’ in my knowledge of structure and language in this unfamiliar writing genre, I made the best use I could of the samples that our tutor had handed out. A typical approach was that I would read the sample provided by the tutor again and again until I had understood the logical organization and academic expression in it. After I worked out an initial outline of my essay, I was encouraged to discuss it with the tutor and my classmates to ensure that I was on the right track. Also, I sought help from the Academic Support Centre at my university. Staff there helped me by drawing attention to my grammatical mistakes, allowing me time to correct them before I submitted the assignment. I think my first writing impressed my lecturer, perhaps because of my language proficiency and clear structure. She gave me many positive comments that greatly encouraged me. However, when I look back at that first assignment today, I realize that (not surprisingly) the writing was not as excellent as I thought it to be at that time. Maybe because that was the first assignment, the lecturer was more tolerant and wanted to promote my confidence.

My next assignment, which required students to use some theory to discuss a specific topic, did not work out as smoothly as the previous one. Even though I had devoted a great amount of energy and time to the writing, it was returned by my tutor with directions for significant revisions. Her comments included statements like: “Your language is too florid and not suitable for academic writing”; “You should go straight to the main point”; and “Your references are not appropriate”. This clear but direct feedback was crippling to my confidence and an unexpected blow to me. At that time I felt so frustrated and confused. I was reluctant to question my writing ability because I was always considered a good writer in China. Surely the problem lay beyond me! For a long time, I was struggling aimlessly and did not know where to start in the re-writing of this assignment.

At that time, writing posed a dilemma for me. On the one hand, I wanted to acculturate into the western community. On the other hand, I wanted to ‘be myself’ as a Chinese young woman studying in Australia. I was extremely reluctant to discard my own writing ‘style’ and identity as a writer which I had developed over nearly ten years. In time, I was able to move beyond

the frustration and disappointment of my second writing assignment in an Australian university. It was awkward and upsetting, but it did not deter me. It kept me thinking: Was my encounter unique? Or did other Chinese overseas students have similar problems? In the area of English writing, was there room for overseas students to have any freedom or flexibility? It was from around that time that I decided I wanted to do some research into the kinds of experiences I was trying to make sense of. But it would be another 7 years, after I had completed my Master's degree, before I would apply for a PhD.

### **Challenges and pleasures in academic writing during my PhD candidature**

For novice researchers, even for students reading and writing in their native language, PhD thesis writing can be like entering a new world. For me, it has been bound up with a complicated dialogic process of thinking, discovering, reading, planning, negotiating and revising. My experience of thesis writing is that it is a struggle. In this sense, I strongly agree with Doecke and Parr's (2005) argument which highlights the dialogic relationship between writing and learning: through continually grappling with many concerns and voices in writing, I am inspired to engage in ongoing critical inquiry, which stimulates me to learn to make sense of life and continually develop my identity as a Chinese researcher-writer in an Australian context.

#### ***'Game rules' are not enough***

Before undertaking my Master's research project, I firmly believed that as long as I kept to the rules of the game, it would be easy to 'acquire' the necessary academic skills of writing in English. However, the process of completing my Master's study and now my PhD thesis has certainly challenged that belief. My thesis writing experiences have involved constant negotiations between language, ideas and voices. It has been more like an odyssey than a game.

A significant part of this odyssey has been 'travelling' to and between other cultures and worlds, both literally and figuratively. I have spent long hours in libraries and reading a great many books related to academic writing strategies and skills for the purpose of getting familiar with the 'game rules'. I had hoped these 'rules' – avoiding grammar mistakes, manipulating linguistic items and rhetoric patterns, following the *required* thesis structure, maintaining 'unity' and 'cohesion', and complying with established writing steps – could result in a successful thesis. However, in the early stages of this odyssey, I encountered enormous

difficulties and obstacles. I could not make much sense of complicated reading resources; I was not comfortable with repeated multilevel revision; my supervisor resisted giving me a template into which I could simply write the chapters that were required; I was constantly dealing with emotional problems associated with the stresses of writing. The first lesson I needed to learn on my thesis writing journey was that ‘rules’ were necessary but not almighty; academic writing was far more complicated than learning and abiding by a single set of rules, or complying with a rigidly constructed set of discourses, in a carefully regulated game.

### *Messy processes*

My thesis writing processes have been characterized by varying degrees of messiness and mystery. I could never have expected or anticipated what would happen from one day to the next. One understanding that became clear from early in my thesis journey was that I would not be ‘doing my research’ and then ‘writing it up’, as some researchers often describe the process of a PhD (see Kamler & Thomson, 2001). In a sense, writing was part of my PhD almost from the moment I enrolled in the degree. This ‘writing’ began long before I typed the first words of any chapter in my thesis. I did a lot of reading, talking, thinking, wondering, reflecting and searching which in itself involved writing, although for a long time I thought of myself as preparing for the moment when I would be ready to begin writing. However, it didn’t happen in that way. Some ideas were born out of my laborious preparatory work, which involved extensive writing, such as the main research questions. Others emerged all of a sudden when I was not looking for them, such as the issue concerning the role of supervisor in English academic writing. Being aware of the ‘non-linear’ nature of composing before embarking on writing this thesis, I was constantly reminded of the importance of being flexible and patient in writing.

I invested a great amount of time and energy in on-going iterative processes of writing, revising, rewriting and revising again. At the same time, I needed to engage in various levels and forms of dialogue. For example, when I did the ‘global’ revision at the discourse level, which was concerned with the ideas and the structure, I needed to go back to some scholarly journals and literature. In doing so, I re-visited my earlier ideas by comparing, interacting and negotiating with ideas from others in my reading. In revising some ‘local’ problems, such as grammar, vocabulary, and linking devices, I often shared my writing with my peers and language supporters from our faculty. Through our discussion, I could generally clarify the problem and settle upon a solution. I would also hand over a draft to my supervisors. Typically, I would

obtain extensive feedback and comments from my supervisors who assisted me in doing further revision, and settling on the next step of writing. In addition to the written/typed feedback on my draft, we regularly conducted meetings to further discuss about my writing. I would often write a dozen drafts, sometimes more, and each one involved cycles of thinking, struggling, writing, revising, exploring, experimenting ... until I discovered exactly what I wanted to say and how I could say it. This dialogic form of revision allowed me to constantly wane and wax, ebb and flow, work forward and backward in my writing.

### ***Engaging with my dialogic communities***

Before beginning this PhD, friends had told me that thesis writing was a very lonely and isolated act. But, the further I travelled on this writing journey, the more I came to question this truism. I have come to see the wisdom in those who speak about writing as a profoundly social and collaborative act (e.g., Doecke & Parr, 2005; Villami & De Guerrero, 2000). Of course, I sat alone to write much of the time; and of course nobody could do that for me. However, what I thought and wrote in my thesis was most definitely “the consequence of my behavior upon others and that of others upon myself” (Dewey, 1927, p. 24). My supervisors were always with me as dialogic colleagues as well as mentors. They not only provided me with valuable suggestions but also assisted me in releasing pressures as we talked through issues and concerns. And peer support has been very important for me. My student researcher peers helped me extend and deepen my thinking. They offered keen and sympathetic ears to talk to and were a never-ending source of advice on everything. Rather than quarantining myself in my own writing, a range of transactions, interactions and exchange with others made my writing the locus for an ongoing dialogue with those in my immediate and not-so-immediate academic community.

To me, writing this PhD thesis became a dialogic inquiry in which I needed to explore a complex range of conflicting voices and thoughts (Bakhtin, 1981). I grew up in China, a country which is proud of its Confucian traditions. My background predisposes me to seek harmony and resolution rather than conflicting both in my study and in my everyday life. However, when I was involved in communication within my writing communities, the substantial diversity of voices made it unrealistic to avoid differences and conflicts in our conversations. A conversation in which a difference of opinion emerged became an opportunity to re-visit and test my original views (some of them are waiting to be tested in my further research!) rather than an imperative to prove my interlocutor wrong. In this way, I found that I

could be aware of the provisionality of my views, and I was able to expand my understanding and enrich my ability to critically scrutinize my own thinking.

Having said that I might be predisposed to want to avoid conflicts, I have to admit that my PhD experiences conflict with some researchers who want to stereotype Asian students as ‘rote learners’ or ‘passive learners’ who lack critical thinking and are adept merely at memorization and imitation (e.g., Fox, 1994). To my mind, such kinds of assertions have unfortunately downplayed the ancient wisdom of Asian countries and mis-represented Confucian traditions. In fact, the essence of the Confucianism strongly advocates critical thinking as well as creativity. The famous saying from Confucius, “师不必贤于弟子，弟子不必不如师” which means that “teachers may not be more knowledgeable than students, and students can be more learned than their teachers”, is a potent example (Cheng, 2000, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003). There was no real alternative than to be a critical thinker, and to develop my thinking, throughout this PhD journey. Negotiating with multiple voices and sources assisted me in this respect.

### *My dialogue with Bakhtin and others...*

Bakhtin’s dialogic theory played a vital role in my research and study. My first exposure to Bakhtin was in a meeting with my supervisor in the first year of my PhD candidature. Perhaps I expected that I would learn about complicated notions such as ‘monologism’ and ‘dialogism’ through my supervisor’s ‘didactic’ instruction. I was wrong. My supervisor seemed to prefer to open up a dialogue with me when I asked for explanations and answers about the kinds of dialogue Bakhtin was advocating:

Supervisor: What would you need to consider if you wanted to buy a new house?

Meihui: I think I would need to think about the location, price, my friends’ suggestions, some data about the properties online, etc.

Supervisor: How would you work with this different information when you make the decision?

Meihui: Well, I guess I would think it over, evaluate all these sources of information. Some may be useful, some may be not.

...

Rather than directly filling the gap in our conversation, my supervisor tried to draw me into a dialogue, or perhaps an ‘academic debate’. As illustrated in the above quote, in order to talk about what Bakhtinian dialogue involved, I had no option of being a passive listener. I needed



to actively engage in the dialogue. I needed to explain, discuss, or even convince my ‘listener’. In this way, I could gain more confidence and autonomy in my learning and understanding of Bakhtin’s theory.

With my writing processes, I was in need of more and more resources about Bakhtin’s dialogic theory to support my understanding. I was confronted with another big problem: the coexistence and juxtaposition of many voices concerned with Bakhtin’s theory. I found a sizable number of scholars and researchers who had put forward a diverse range of arguments interpreting or responding to his theory. Together with the information I gathered from my meetings with my supervisors, the notes I took in my reading, and casual conversations with my research peers about Bakhtin’s works, I sometimes felt that I was drowning in oceans of information and theorizing. I saw the messy conglomerate of Bakhtinian ‘utterances’ as an obstacle for my learning. I recall a time when my supervisor emailed me to inquire about my progress in reading and writing. I desperately replied that I could not write anything because of what I saw as all those different ideas – Bakhtin, would perhaps call this ‘heteroglossia’. My supervisor encouraged me to ‘have a go’ and assured me that ‘writing helps in the process of building understanding’.

### **My identity work as an English learner-researcher-writer**

Much of the story I have related above shows that I am increasingly influenced by authors such as Ivanič (1998), who suggests that “writing is not just about conveying ‘content’ but also about the representation of self. Who we are affects how we write, whatever we are writing” (p. 181). Researching across cultures in my PhD has given rise to some challenges for my thesis writing. As a writer in English, although I was tagged with the label of a “language minority” (Chang & Schmida, 2006, p. 99), I had a strong desire to locate my voice and develop my own identity. This meant that first drafts of many chapters in this thesis were interwoven with both academic knowledge and my personal experiences. I was conscious that I took a risk in writing in this way because it seemed that using impersonal arguments was more in keeping with dominant western writing norms. Thus, I would be very nervous when I showed a draft of new writing to my supervisor. However, my supervisor mostly appreciated and supported my writing and let me have a far freer hand in boosting my own voice in writing.

Needless to say, I vigorously challenge those who speak of a “cultural bias” in international

research, a bias which assumes that English culture is superior and should be privileged (Tan, 2000, p. 15). However, I have needed to consider, and to some extent connect with, the expectations of academics immersed in western culture who are more likely to read my thesis. Sometimes, I have needed to consider how I could better acculturate myself into an Australian academic community. I have thus spent considerable time learning the requirements associated with what is often spoken of as the logic, coherence and unity of English academic writing. However, at the same time I believe that writing across cultures has allowed me to have more opportunities to develop and articulate my unique individuality. For me, writing is partly the work of my heart. Thus, I have wanted to feel that I am in control of my writing rather than silencing myself in order to speak in a western authoritative academic voice. I never want to hide my Chinese background in my English writing. I am keen on shaping a new identity in my English writing by occasionally using “China Englishes” (Li, 1993). As I have said, writing is a struggle. And part of this struggle has been learning how to express my thoughts appropriately and academically. Again, I am very lucky to have supervisors understanding my questions and respecting my thoughts. For example, they encouraged me to occasionally use Chinese characters highlighting a concept with distinctly Chinese cultural significance. When my choice of English words in my initial translation of a Chinese transcription resulted in some misunderstandings due to the Chinese cultural nuance, rather than deleting or changing the translation straightaway, we negotiated a way to work with the problematic translation and even made this a virtue of the writing at that point. The use of ellipses or square brackets sometimes helped me keep my original words while giving English-speaking readers some clarification to assist their understanding. It is a new and refreshing experience for me to be another person in and through my writing. Rather than totally following or denying my Chinese or Australian identity, I strive in the following chapters of my thesis to establish a ‘third space’ in my English academic writing where I can negotiate the identity complications that come from working in and between different but connected cultural spaces.

# **Chapter 1 Situating the Study**

## **1.1 Background of the study**

In this globally interconnected world, the mobility of school and university students continues to increase. Every year, more and more students from across the world are choosing to travel to English-speaking countries, such as the United States, Canada, the UK, and Australia, to pursue their higher education studies. The international education industry is recognized as Australia's third largest export sector – just behind iron ore and coal (Universities Australia, 2016). In 2015, according to the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2015), there were 645,185 international student enrolments in Australia, which represented a 9.8% increase on 2014 figures. Among these enrolments, the higher education sector had the largest share of enrolments: 42.2%. Growth in the international student population in the Australian higher education is expected to continue for the next few years. These international students come from a wide range of countries, but China is currently the source of the largest number of higher education students.

The presence of international students in Australian universities both enriches the academic environment and adds remarkable diversity to these institutions in terms of learning experience, views of the world, and classroom communication styles (Neri & Ville, 2008). On the other hand, it is generally realized that a more culturally diverse student population has brought challenges for many Australian universities' educators and graduate research supervisors. Australian academics sometimes find it hard to "guide students from diverse backgrounds to successful attainment of learning outcomes for particular courses or programs of study" (Schmitt, 2005, p. 63). International students have different values and expectations with respect to educational practices and outcomes, which are influenced by their own experience of education in their home context. Each cultural group has its own understandings of the teaching-learning process. Often, higher education educators and supervisors struggle to find appropriate pedagogies and assessments because of their lack of familiarity with the characteristics and expectations of those international students (Ryan & Carroll, 2005).

Moreover, many Australian educators and supervisors are concerned about these international students' academic literacy skills and capability (Wang, 2016). In particular, they have

registered concerns about international students' English academic writing, which becomes a vital factor in determining academic success (Lillis & Curry, 2006). They tend to think that most international students in higher education have serious deficits in their English scholarly writing in terms of accuracy, fluency and clarity.

While international students are attracted by Australia's reputation as a provider of higher quality education systems, the supportive learning environment, and multicultural and diverse society (The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia Government, 2010), research suggests they suffer many pressures and encounter various challenges while learning in a foreign country. The challenges include unfamiliar social and cultural conventions, different modes of teaching and learning, and language barriers arising from particularities of local languages and discipline-specific vocabulary (Ryan & Carroll, 2005, p. 5). Despite the different linguistic, cultural and educational knowledge, skills and discourses that Chinese international students have acquired from their initial learning experience in Australia, many still have difficulty accommodating Australian practices and being accepted by Australian academic circles. Even though Chinese postgraduate students have obtained a Bachelor's degree in their home country or other countries, and even though they have met the English language requirement for admission into English speaking universities, some of them still struggle as they attempt to deal with a new learning and living environment.

In order to socialize and acculturate into the discourse communities in which Chinese postgraduate students pursue their academic studies in different English-speaking international countries, these multilingual speakers need to develop considerable English academic capability (Chang, 2004; Wu, 2002). However, due to their limited education and practice of English writing in their home country, they tend to regard English writing as a dreaded ordeal (Schmitt, 2005). Several studies suggest that higher education students whose first language is not English struggle with sentence-level problems involving grammar and vocabulary, text-level problems involving generating ideas and structure, and surface-level mechanics such as spelling and punctuation (Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Raimes, 1987). Moreover, as Xu (2012) observes, Chinese researchers' English scholarly writing is less competitive internationally due to perceived weaknesses in structure, logic, coherence, and the researchers' awkward use of academic English vocabulary.

Different studies over time have tried to explain international students' academic writing difficulties from different perspectives. For example, 26 years ago Crowhurst (1991) argued that ESL students' writing challenges derived from their different cultural perspective: "Under the influence of the norms within their own culture, they may deviate from the norms of the foreign culture in what kinds of materials are to be included in a particular variety of written discourse, what style is appropriate, and how the discourse is to be organized" (p. 21). Much later, Reid (2006) argued that international students' writing skills are "often limited because their prior English education has not provided opportunities for composing writing, preferring instead exercises in written grammar or answering reading questions in single sentence" (p. 79). In other words, according to these researchers, international students' academic writing practices in English have been restricted to a narrow range of linguistic and what might be termed 'textual' dimensions. This means they are less well prepared to develop English language practices that are deeply embedded in specific social, cultural and disciplinary contexts (Wang, 2016). International students who try to write for academic purposes often struggle to become competent participants in the academic discourse community that is related to "the context of culture, the socio-historically produced norms and conventions of a particular group of people who define themselves among other things, by their discourse practices" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 78). To date, little empirical evidence has been collected to examine the nature of Chinese postgraduate students' academic writing practices in international settings, and certainly not in Australian universities. Neither has there been much research attention given to the factors that mediate their writing practices with respect to their different disciplines or academic fields.

It is clear, then, that academic writers whose first language is not English are confronted with a range of linguistic, discourse and knowledge challenges. They also experience significant challenges in relation to their identity. Fu and Townsend (1998) suggest that for ESL writers who wish to write authentically and persuasively in academic English, are required to undergo a change of thinking and cultural perspective. In China, a rich and complex history with respect to culture, language, and rhetoric dating back over five thousand years has shaped the ways in which citizens have understood themselves and their identities (Young, 1994). When Chinese graduate students from a cultural background influenced by Confucianism learn to write about their research findings in scholarly English, they invariably need to engage with a different set of cultural, social and educational expectations to develop a sense of identity as a multilingual Chinese researcher-writer (Zhao & Coombs, 2012). What is more, educators and supervisors

in most English-speaking universities are inclined to expect that international students will “perform in and [be] assessed against the conventions of the host country’s educational values and practices” (McLean & Ransom, 2005). As a result, students are likely to experience some challenges to their sense of self and indeed some reduction in self-esteem as they attempt to write in English, especially it seems when writing in academic settings.

There are differences in perception about appropriate and effective self-representation in English academic writing, between Second Language (L2) writers and the educators (including lecturers, professors and supervisors) across different disciplines (and even within the same disciplines) (Stacey, 2009). Some research suggests individual factors and academic contexts might influence the negotiation of identity for all postgraduate student researchers when writing for academic purposes, and in my experience leading up to this PhD study, I found anecdotal evidence to suggest that international students have particular experiences of this negotiation. The way in which such students negotiate these identity issues is often referred to as ‘identity work’ (cf. Bauman, 2004; Gee, 2000). This is consistent with Bakhtin’s (1981) theorizing of language, writing and identity being shaped by interrelated ideologies, voices, cultures and histories in dialogue with each other. In this study, I propose to look into Chinese students’ researcher-writer identity work when they face not only linguistic difficulties in English scholarly writing, but also sociocultural challenges in particular academic discourse communities (Lillis, Harrington, Lea & Mitchell, 2015).

It is important to note from the outset that I have conducted this study as a Chinese PhD student specializing in English academic writing. My own experiences of overseas study in an Australian university and my personal conversations with students who are studying (or have studied) abroad involve some of the abovementioned challenges. In undertaking this study, I have been driven to develop deeper, more culturally nuanced understandings of Chinese students’ stories, and my own experiences of these kinds of challenges have been a significant factor in the study. Prior to undertaking this PhD study, I completed a minor Master’s thesis (as mentioned in the Preamble), where I began to appreciate how English academic writing is more than an individualistic action; it is a social activity, influenced by multiple voices in the writer’s academic and everyday life. These experiences have allowed me to develop some initial understandings about English academic writing. More importantly, they have motivated me to further explore the nature of Chinese postgraduate students’ academic writing in English. In particular, I have been inspired to help them to improve their English academic writing.

## 1.2 Purposes of the study and research questions

This research project adopts a qualitative case study research design to explore English academic writing practices of Chinese postgraduate students studying in different universities in Australia. Overall, the study seeks to:

- 1) *contribute to research knowledge about English academic writing by investigating Chinese postgraduate students' writing practices.*

I seek to identify Chinese postgraduate students' beliefs of English academic writing, the problems they encounter and the strategies they use. Also, I explain and critically analyze these problems and strategies. I show how accounts of researcher-writers' writing practices should include an examination of the way they negotiate their identity in English academic writing. I investigate the factors that influence their perceptions and experiences of their identity negotiation. In this way, this study contributes to the literature about the nature of Chinese postgraduate students' academic writing practices and the importance of writer identity in these practices.

- 2) *deepen supervisors' understandings of Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing practices and encourage them to offer better support to those students.*

I hope to inform or influence pedagogical approaches in Australia to better cater for international students' distinctive writing and cultural features. In particular, the study seeks to deepen supervisors' awareness of Chinese postgraduate students' prior learning experience and exposure to teaching approaches, and therefore to help them appreciate that cultural difference between East and West literacy practices is not necessarily the only reason for Chinese postgraduate students' writing problems and challenges.

- 3) *help Chinese students who are pursuing research degrees in Australia's academic communities to improve their English academic writing and academic capabilities to achieve success as English learners/users and as academics.*

I hope that Chinese international students can be informed and inspired by this study about different strategies to overcome their academic writing challenges and improve the overall quality of their academic writing. Also, the study could empower them by not branding them with negative stereotypes or constructing their identity in deficit terms, but rather inviting them into conversations to get new insights of the negotiation of researcher-writer identity.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned research purposes, this project proposes to address the following research questions:

- 1) What are Chinese postgraduate students' understandings and experiences of English academic writing practices in Australian universities?
- 2) What factors influence and mediate Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing practices?
- 3) How do Chinese postgraduate students negotiate their researcher-writer identities in English academic writing?

I mainly employ qualitative research methods to explore these three research questions. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), qualitative research is “a process of trying to gain a better understanding of the complexities of human experience” (p. 23). In line with this thinking, I use qualitative research to investigate the complexity of Chinese researcher-writers' English writing practices and the negotiation of their researcher-writer identities. One of the salient features of a qualitative study is an emphasis on the authenticity of human experiences, including both the participants' and the researcher's stories (Silverman, 2009). I am very aware that as the researcher, my descriptions and interpretations of the participants' experiences are influenced by my previous and present experience as a writer and learner in similar or contrasting cultural settings (Gao, 2012). For this reason, in this study, I make space to narrate my own experiences of English academic writing as a Chinese PhD student as well as my experiences as a language teacher in a secondary college in Australia (see Chapter 5) in order to enhance the reflexivity of my analysis and to enhance the trustworthiness of the whole study (cf. Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The qualitative research design I adopt for this study combines a case study approach with narrative-based inquiry methods. According to Yin (2003), “case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Such a design suits my aims to investigate Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing in authentic settings. It enables me to construct a coherent overall narrative and to tell interrelated stories involving rich and thick description of lived experience (Simons, 2009). Ultimately, a case study approach allows me both to represent ‘everyday’ experiences and also to probe the research issues I identify in my literature review which are important for understanding those lived experience.



A crucial aim of this study has been to show in nuanced ways how the Chinese participants' understandings and experiences of English academic writing are different and changing depending on a number of factors shaping them. Narrative-based inquiry best allows me to do this. According to Doecke and Parr (2009): "Narratives in all their diversity and multiplicity make up the fabric of our lives: they are constitutive moments in the formation of our identities and our sense of community affiliation" (p. 66). My use of narrative provides a space for rich description and rigorously theorized inquiry. I am more interested in presenting truth in provisional and dialogic terms that promote further dialogue rather than in asserting definitive truths that seek to destroy alternative perspectives (Bakhtin, 1981). I use narrative-based inquiry approaches in a dialogic way, as proposed by Parr (2010), allowing me to show how the various stories I tell to speak to each other, either by affirming their commonality or emphasising the contrasts and differences. This has meant paying close attention to the need to contextualize and historicize my participants' stories of their English academic writing practices in order to show how various contextual factors mediate their English writing experiences in Australian universities.

### **1.3 Conceptualising the study**

This study utilises Bakhtin's dialogic theory and the literature surrounding English academic writing in order to propose a conceptual framework for understanding and discussing Chinese postgraduate students' academic writing practices. The central philosophy behind the decision to focus on Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing practices and their identity work is based on Bakhtin's theorizing of dialogue and language. Bakhtin, an important figure in this study, believes that the richest dialogue involves a special kind of interaction which is dependent upon a rich variety of voices in a particular context. These different voices may be "juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 291-292). Further, this study takes the view that language is inherently interactive and dialogic rather than a closed and stable system because "the word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it, the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 279-280). The "intersubjective" nature of language underscores the evolving and complex relations between 'self' and 'other' throughout this study. For instance, 'self' might be seen as one of the Chinese postgraduate participants and 'others' might be seen as all other postgraduate students studying in Australian universities, but the nature of each can only be understood through an

awareness of their relationship to each other. I am interested in the relationships between this notion of self and other – I am interested to investigate how common experiences are shared between them. On the other hand, ‘self’ might refer to myself as researcher and the ‘others’ refer to the other participants in this study. I am interested to investigate the extent to which my own experiences are shared by the other participants in this study or indeed other Chinese postgraduate students studying in Australia.

When English writers are writing in English, they are immersed within and contribute to a heteroglossia of voices that make up an academic research community. By signaling that I am interested in the relationships between self and other, I am also indicating that I wish to investigate the different voices that make up this heteroglossia, the relationships between the Chinese researcher-writers’ voices I have studied most closely and their English academic writing that they are also describing to me. Bakhtin relates the everyday use of language to a sense of an ongoing dialogue of life between individuals and their social surroundings. Bakhtin’s dialogic theory, which I articulate at greater length in Chapter 2, constitutes the main theoretical foundations for my research, and it has inspired me to investigate English academic writing from particular social contexts and dialogic perspectives.

My study starts with the premise that academic writing is socially situated and dialogic in nature. It assumes that all research writing is undertaken, and exists, in particular discourse communities and in conversations with other writer-researchers (Ivanič, 1998; Lillis, 2003; Prior, 2001). In order to investigate the interrelationships within and between various kinds of English academic writing activities (e.g., writing problems, reasons behind problems, strategies used in writing) of the participants in this study, it is crucial to understand the multiple dimensions of dialogue that are potentially present in any writing artefact. For this study, I work with Parr’s (2010) conceptualisation of dialogue in writing. Any act of writing, Parr argues, contains within it a dynamic, unstable but ongoing potential for interchange of ideas between writers (or within a single writer), between texts (or within a single text), or between communities (or within a single community).

In the study, I plan to examine practices of English academic writing in a socio-cultural paradigm, with a focus on the issue of researcher-writer identity in Chinese postgraduate students’ writing. Researcher-writer identity in this study is understood to be multi-faceted and fluid, constantly evolving and changing within particular social, academic, and cultural

contexts. It is something that a researcher-writer constantly builds and negotiates through interaction with other researcher-writers in the communities in which he/she operates (Thornborrow, 1999). Bhabha's (1994) notion of a "third space", as he applies it to analyzing L2 writing practices, is helpful in understanding a dialogic conception of writer identity (see Chapter 2). Bhabha imagines a meeting point – a 'third space' – which allows writers to identify but also transcend the boundaries of self and Other (cf. Kostogriz, 2005). In that sense, writers in any community draw on different resources to make sense of the world and develop their identity by situating themselves 'in-between' multiple funds of knowledge and culture. A more comprehensive understanding and explanation of the concept of researcher-writer is located in Chapter 2.

My interest in investigating Chinese postgraduate students' academic writing practices has evolved from my uncomfortable response to much research literature in this field which regards L2 writers as deficient in terms of language and culture (Reyes, 1992). For instance, Asian students are often stereotyped as being good at a "conserving and reproductive" approach to knowledge and learning which mainly relies on "memorisation and imitation" (Ballard, 1984, p. 49). Chinese student identity is characterised by some researchers (e.g., Flowerdew, 1998; Hammond & Gao, 2002) as being obedient to authority, lacking in critical and creative thinking, and being weak at logical thinking. Such deficit characterisations cannot be easily applied to the participants in this study, and it certainly does not help to explain their writing and research practices. Nor is it adequate to explain the complex challenges faced by these participants merely by invoking their Confucian heritage, as some researchers (e.g., Biggs, 1996; Cheng, 2006) might want to do. While this study remains alert to the shaping influence of cultural factors, it also appreciates that processes of writing are associated with a multiple range of voices and a wealth of their links and interrelationships with different discourses, cultures and languages (Bakhtin, 1981). This study seeks to represent practices of scholarly writing in English by these Chinese postgraduate students as composed of complex and dialogic communicative acts. In order to understand these practices and acts, I present them as individual but related 'cases'. And I proceed to investigate the 'cases' from various perspectives, such as social, cultural, educational perspectives and so on.

Although there are many research studies centred on L2 writers' products and processes as separate concepts (Baroudy, 2008), it is rare to find studies that seek to explore interactions between writers (or within a single writer), between texts (or within a single text) as well as

between cultures (or within a single culture). This present study looks into the different interaction activities and negotiation of identity of Chinese researcher-writers from a dialogic theoretical lens. I pay particular attention to how different writing activities (e.g., reading, thinking, drafting, discussing with other writers, and revising) are related to each other and how they influence and are influenced by each other. Also, although a great variety of writing strategies by L2 writers have been defined and classified in empirical studies (e.g., Mu & Carrington, 2007; Murphy & Marin, 2008; Yang & Plakans, 2012), these studies do not provide much clarity about relationships between writers' strategies used in their writing behaviours and the ways they make these different strategies 'work' for them. This study aims to identify particular strategies that Chinese postgraduate students adopt in English academic writing activities, the reasons behind their choice of these strategies, and the influences of these strategies on their writing in their PhDs or in other research publications.

Despite the increasing variety and depth of research in this area with regard to the international L2 writers with different academic needs and requirements, there has been little investigation into the ways Chinese research students struggle (productively) to improve their English academic writing. In this respect, the story of my own struggles as a Chinese postgraduate researcher-writer plays a crucial role in this study. Using critical autobiography methods, I provide an in-depth, reflexive inquiry into my experiences, one that is aware of the need to situate my reflections with respect to particular theories of language and identity that underpin the whole study. But I do not rely on my own perspective, only. The case studies of the four other Chinese postgraduate participants also make use of nuanced narratives for representing and inquiring into their stories and experiences, but again I am aware of the need to situate these stories within a carefully conceptualised understanding of identity, experience and (for that matter) story. This study addresses the significant gap in the literature regarding the challenges and experiences of Chinese research students writing and researching in English in Australian institutions.

Overall, it is hoped that the findings from this study contribute to the understanding of the Chinese postgraduate students' English scholarly writing practices. This study does not jump to easy generalizations. I do not claim that my findings can be applied widely across all Chinese overseas students studying anywhere in Australia. However, by carefully situating each case in a particular socio-cultural context, and by promoting dialogic inquiry into and between each case, I trust this study can provide a rigorous, critical (and occasionally creative) and reflexive

account of these Chinese postgraduate researcher-writers' stories, beliefs and experiences. It offers valuable knowledge for Chinese postgraduate students, their supervisors and the institutions in which they study at a time when more and more Chinese students studying overseas need this kind of knowledge in order to achieve their potential.

## **1.4 A road map to the thesis**

### **Preamble**

The Preamble chapter is a critical autobiographical account of my experiences of learning to write in English both in China and in Australia. I open the thesis in this way in order to provide some personal, cultural, biographical and contextual background to this study. Also, this autobiography writing has been important in terms of the methodology of the study because the design situates myself as one of the participants.

### **Chapter 1: Situating the Study**

This chapter has situated the study with respect to existing research into Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing practice and researcher-writer identity work. I discussed the context of my study from the perspective of the challenges that Chinese international students typically experience and the difficulties that English-speaking educators typically encounter in their teaching and assessment of Chinese international students in higher education settings. The chapter introduces and briefly discusses the research aims and questions, and provides an introduction to the conceptual framework of the study.

### **Chapter 2: Language, Learning and Identity**

This chapter delves into the theoretical framework for the study in more detail. I foreground how Bakhtinian dialogic theory and Vygotskian socio-cultural theories, and some other key theorists, provide a useful framework to investigate Chinese postgraduate learner-scholars' experiences of developing their English academic writing. I show how these theorists help me to explore the relationship between complex researcher-writer identities and the particular cultural and institutional learning environments in which the participants were studying and writing. The second section of this chapter critically engages with a body of literature on World Englishes and China English, and shows how these discourses have helped shape existing understandings of L2 writing practices in places like Australia.

### **Chapter 3: L2 Teaching and Writing Practices**

This chapter discusses three traditions of L2 teaching in general, and three approaches to teaching L2 writing in particular. These are: grammar-oriented approaches and study skills approaches; communicative language teaching approaches and process-influenced approaches; intercultural language teaching approaches and new literacy studies approaches.

The following section of this chapter looks into L2 students' experiences of writing in relation to some significant studies in this field, as well as my own experiences as a Chinese postgraduate student in Australia and in China. Some major issues that are identified and discussed are concerned with L2 writing product or process paradigms, such as indirect pattern of text organization, critical thinking in writing, social communication in writing practices, and reading and intertextuality. These issues help to frame some important dimensions of the narrative case writing in later chapters.

### **Chapter 4: Methodological Matters**

The methodology chapter begins by locating the epistemological standpoint of the research, and it includes the rationale for employing various qualitative research methods to generate data in this study. I start with my reasons for working with constructivist paradigms of knowledge and knowledge making, and then move on to explain how Bakhtinian notions of dialogism are particularly appropriate for the analytical work, especially in relation to writing practices and identity work. The next section of the methodology chapter involves an explanation of the research design bringing together a case study approach with narrative-based inquiry methods. Then I present details of recruitment process and data gathering procedure, as well as the methods for data analysis and interpretation.

### **Chapter 5: My Autobiographical Narrative**

This chapter, the first of five narrative cases in Part Four, presents a reflexive autobiographical narrative. In this narrative, I recount and reflect on some professional writing experiences as a teacher in a secondary school in Melbourne and how those writing experiences relate to my sense of myself as a writer, learner, and researcher. I have drawn upon raw data in the form of my reflexive journal to present an account of my own dialogic story about my development as a writer of English and the identity work this involves.

## **Chapters 6 – 9: Narrative Cases**

These four chapters make up the rest of the Part Four narrative cases. In these chapters, I present narrative accounts of the experiences of four Chinese postgraduate students – Shane, Ada, Susan and Helen – from different disciplines, studying in different Australian universities. The four ‘cases’ were generated from the participants’ responses to a questionnaire and then transcripts of a series of extended interviews I conducted with them. In presenting their narratives, I focus on the successes they have had in developing their English academic writing practices, the difficulties they have encountered, some strategies they have used to engage with and manage these difficulties, and the ways they negotiated their complex researcher-writer identities in their English academic writing.

## **Chapter 10: Dialogic Writing Practices**

Based on the theoretical framework I develop from a combination of Bakhtinian dialogic theory and Vygotskian sociocultural theory, I analyze and discuss the four Chinese postgraduate students’ and my own writing practices, showing how our writing does not happen in a cultural vacuum. But neither is it culturally determined. Rather, our writing practices occur within and are mediated by the interactions between/within texts and people, through internal and external forms of dialogue. In this chapter, I identify and discuss four categories of ‘dialogue’ involved in the students’ developing English academic writing: 1) interpersonal dialogue; 2) intrapersonal dialogue; 3) intertextual dialogue; and 4) intratextual dialogue.

## **Chapter 11: Inner Dialogue, Cultural Hybridity and Heteroglossia**

This chapter teases out participants’ experiences of researcher-writer identity work in English academic writing. I identify three key themes that encompass the complexity in their identity work: 1) generating and managing the ‘inner dialogue’ associated with Chinese and English writing practices; 2) researcher-writer identity work; 3) factors mediating researcher-writer identity work. Using these themes to anchor my exploration, I then begin to explore how, and to what extent, the narrative cases can be understood as interconnecting dialogically with each other.

## **Chapter 12: Conclusion**

In this final chapter, I summarize the findings of my research through identifying and critically engaging with key issues and themes in the five narrative cases in Chapters 5-9. I structure this

summary in terms of the three research questions I proposed in Chapter 1. Following this, I make a number of recommendations with respect to various groups of people, such as Chinese postgraduate researcher-writers, supervisors of these students, policy makers and researchers in this area. I conclude the chapter and my thesis with a final epilogue which reflects on the development of my English academic writing practices throughout the seven years' of my PhD journey.

I now move on to Part Two of the thesis, which is a critical review of relevant literature in my study. This review is divided into two chapters: Chapter 2, 'Language, Learning and Identity'; and Chapter 3, 'L2 Teaching and Writing Practices'.



## **PART TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **Chapter 2 Language, Learning and Identity**

### **2.1 Two theoretical approaches to language and learning**

There has been a surge of interest in the contribution of the Bakhtinian circle of scholars to the fields of language research and practice (see Ball & Warshauer-Freedman, 2004; Hall, Vitanova & Marchenkova, 2005; Hamston, 2006; Parr, 2010). Building on a philosophical aspiration for dialogue in the discussion of literary texts and in all teaching and learning, Mikhail Bakhtin urges readers to focus on social and interpersonal dimensions of language. His dialogic theory has provided a conceptual framework for practitioners and researchers to challenge traditional approaches to L2 teaching and learning in western countries. Another theorist whose work has been appropriated in challenges to traditional L2 teaching and learning is Lev Vygotsky. A pioneering Soviet psychologist and a vital scholar in the circle of Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), Vygotsky's works, since they were translated into English in the mid-twentieth century, have made a major contribution to the study of language, teaching and learning. Important concepts in his SCT, such as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), private and inner speech, and the social dimensions of teaching and learning, have been extensively applied to second language acquisition (Johnson, 2004). These concepts often underpin advocacy for collaborative learning in L2 pedagogy, including collaboration between teacher and learners and between learners, and they provide a framework for investigating students' processes and practices in L2 reading and writing (Ehrich, 2006; Vanderburg, 2006).

In investigating language and culture from L2 teaching and learning perspectives, I have found that the combination of Bakhtinian and Vygotskian theories allows me to examine the experiences, practices and products of Chinese postgraduate students' academic writing in English in a different light from those traditional approaches to L2 teaching in general and L2 writing in particular. Bakhtin and Vygotsky, together with the range of writing that Bakhtinian and Vygotskian scholars have published, also offer me a powerful framework for investigating L2 students' complex academic and cultural identities and the implications of these identities for their academic writing practices in English. I begin this review of relevant literature published by Bakhtin and Vygotsky and other language scholars who have worked with their theories, by presenting some important ideas about SCT produced and developed by the Vygotskian circle.

### **2.1.1 Vygotskian circle: The zone of proximal development & inner speech**

A wealth of research (e.g., Lo Bianco, 2009; Poehner, 2008) has been published to explore the relevance and importance of SCT to second language acquisition, although there is much contestation and disagreement amongst socio-cultural theorists as to the importance and conception of language and culture in that research. In common with much educational research using SCT, my study draws on different combinations of Vygotskian themes, but I concentrate on two main concepts of the Vygotskian circle's ideas – zone of proximal development (ZPD) and inner speech.

#### ***The zone of proximal development***

Learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90)

Central to Vygotsky's theoretical framework is the understanding that human cognitive development and learning processes are deeply social and cultural by nature as much as they are an individual phenomenon. Vygotsky (1986) probes into the relationship between what he calls 'lower natural mental functions', such as elementary perceptions which are unconscious and driven by environmental stimulation, and 'higher mental functions', which are more concerned with concept information and problem-solving. Elementary perceptions, he says, are gradually transformed into higher mental functions through the process of mediated social interactions. In this sense, Vygotsky believes that learning is likely to occur in a system of relations mediated through conscious awareness and through social interactions and mentoring. Painter (1995) explains Vygotsky's approach to concept development as follows,

Rather than a development model of linear stages, he [Vygotsky] saw learning as a dialectical, spiralling process, where achievement at one "level" provides a stepping stone to the next, which having been attained, transforms the next. (p. 35)

Other scholars (e.g., Daniels, 2001) suggest that Vygotsky has developed a theory in which social, cultural, and historical factors occupy a crucial role in an individual's intellectual, linguistic and social development.

Vygotsky's notion of ZPD, which draws from his theory of higher mental functioning intimately bound up with sociocultural factors, is widely adopted in studies of students' learning processes. Vygotsky (1978) defines ZPD as,

The distance between the actual development level [of a child learner] as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problems solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 86)

This notion of ZPD says that child learners are not always able to complete some tasks alone, but with assistance or guidance from more-skilled persons, they are able to complete not just these tasks but to complete them at a level of complexity or competence beyond their capacities as independent individuals. Initially, this theory raises awareness of the importance of cooperation and interaction in children's learning processes, but a great deal of research has demonstrated how relevant it is to older learners as well. In that sense, Wood, Bruner and Ross's (1976) idea of scaffolding parallels Vygotsky's notion of ZPD. Scaffolding, which initially represents the helpful interactional support children gain from adults to achieve successful completion of a task or mastery of a skill, also plays a crucial role in students' language acquisition, cognitive development, and literacy skills improvement (Clay, 2005).

In my study, I apply Vygotsky's theory of ZPD to my investigation of the crucial role of the social community plays in Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing practices. In particular, I investigate the role of communication and sometimes collaboration with their peers as they write, and in dealing with their supervisors' written and spoken comments on their writing (e.g., in a form of written dialogue with their supervisors). I also examine how these students are sometimes able to take full advantage of their ZPD with support from others (and their institution) in their English academic writing.

One might argue that the focus here is on external social speech, and this has certainly been important in my study of Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing practices. However, Vygotsky (1986) also puts forward and conceptualizes another concept - "inner speech" (1986, p. 225) - which has an equally important role in the study. In the next section, I tease out this concept of 'inner speech', and show its relevance to my study.

### ***Inner speech***

Language is seen as first a means of communicating with others, and later an aid to thinking, which becomes more powerful as "inner speech" than it was earlier. (Schneider, 1990, p. 5)

Vygotsky believes that speech plays a significant part in children's transition from regulation by others to self-regulation (Diaz et al., 1990, as cited in Buzzelli, 1995). He finds a child starts to engage in "private speech" when he/she will "talk only about himself, take no interest in his interlocutor, do not try to communicate, expect no answers, and often do not even care whether anyone listens to him", at the age of about three (1986, p. 15 – gender assumptions left as Vygotsky and his translators wrote them). He draws from these observations that children's private speech has a role in their psychological functioning and learning which is closely associated with children's ability to use language to understand, guide and control their own behaviours. Therefore, it represents the emergence of a new self-regulative function of speech (Wertsch, 1980). This notion of private speech gradually disappears in his writing, transforming into the phrase "inner speech" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 225). Vygotsky regards 'inner speech' as children's highest level of self-regulation, as best illustrated when they use it to formulate their own ways to solve some problems (Buzzelli, 1995). Inner speech can also be seen as a crucial part of adults' meaning making and intellectual functioning, and scholars tend to see this as central to what Vygotsky terms 'higher mental' activity (Vygotsky, 1986).

Vygotsky (1986) has differentiated inner speech from external speech in two ways, which he calls semantic differences and syntactical differences. From the semantic perspective, Vygotsky asserts that there is a prevalence of 'sense' over 'meaning'. He argues that "meaning is only one of the zones of sense, the most stable and precise zone" (1962, p. 146). On the other hand, the word sense has many zones because it is "the sum of all the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 245). The *sense* of a word is defined through the context in which it appears and this changes in different situations. What is more, due to the unstable nature of this sense, the senses of words are always in flux – they combine and flow into one another and affect each other (Vygotsky, 1986). Although Vygotsky's assertions are not specific to the dialogic nature of inner speech, Wertsch (1980) and Parr (2010) draw a crucial connection here between Vygotsky and Bakhtin to propose a distinctive understanding of the dialogic dimensions about inner speech. Parr maintains that the word in inner speech does not "draw(s) dialogic potentialities from the variety of 'senses' around it" – as though these existed in a reified form that can be somehow absorbed by an individual. Rather, the use of the word "realizes or activates these potential connections in the social dynamic" (2010, p. 94). In my study, I see inner speech as potentially "a unique form of internal collaboration with oneself" (Vygotsky, 1929, as cited in Wertsch, 1980, p. 153), which is crucial to identify the reflections of the Chinese postgraduate participants about the various

scholarly artefacts and texts they generated (in social contexts) in their study and research in Australia.

By looking at the syntactic perspective, it is possible to clarify the ways in which dialogic inner speech is different from perhaps more widely understood notions of dialogue in social speech. The syntax of inner speech is, according to Vygotsky, highly abbreviated leaving only essential elements because the ‘speakers’ have full knowledge of the subject under consideration:

Predication is a natural form of inner speech; psychologically it consists of predictions only. It is as much a law of inner speech to omit subjects as it is a law of written speech to contain both subject and predicate. (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 243)

Vygotsky explains this notion through an example of someone waiting for a bus. When the bus arrives, inner speech would not say “the bus for which I am waiting is coming”. Rather, the sentence is likely to be reduced to “coming”.

Inner speech performs diverse functions in people’s language learning in different situations. When probing into the mental rehearsal in L2 learning, Guerrero (1991) argues that inner speech in mental rehearsal is a powerful L2 learning strategy and summarizes the roles of inner speech in language learning as follows:

Table 2.1 Guerrero’s (1991) roles of inner speech in language learning (p. 10)

Roles	Functions
1. Ideational	To create ideas; to analyze ideas; to clarify thoughts
2. Mnemonic	To store language in memory; to retrieve language from memory
3. Textual	To create/give structure to oral or written texts; to organize verbal data in a sequence; to experiment with language
4. Instructional	To imitate pronunciation; to apply grammar rules; to make sentences with words
5. Evaluative	To assess extent and quality of language knowledge; to self-evaluate and self-correct language; to other-evaluate and other-correct language
6. Affective	To obtain self-satisfaction; to reduce nervousness; to acquire self-confidence; to obtain self-diversion; to improve self-image
7. Interpersonal	To imagine/initiate conversations with others
8. Intrapersonal	To talk to oneself

Guerrero's (1991) summary of the roles of inner speech in language learning was helpful in suggesting prompts for me to use when interviewing my participants about the ways they prepared or planned for writing, the ways they explored or challenged ideas in their writing, and the ways they reflected on or regulated their thoughts and metacognitive awareness. My study sees inner speech as a form of internal collaboration with oneself as one is writing, but this is not just happening inside one's head, insulated from the outside world. In fact, inner speech draws on and seeks to make sense of the various artefacts in the social world of the learner including the words and artefacts that he/she is writing.

### ***Language in ZPD and inner speech***

Vygotsky's notions of ZPD and inner speech do not work separately or independently. Rather, they intertwine with one another developmentally (Vanderburg, 2006, p. 378). For example, children may communicate with adults in their ZPD to formulate and develop their inner speech. You could say that language and dialogue are prerequisites for ZPD and inner speech. Vygotsky was proposing an understanding of language from a sociocultural perspective in which language serves as not only a means by which people communicate but also a mediating tool for people to "think, learn or co-construct language together" (Mercer, 1995, p. 4). Vygotsky (1987) stresses the role of language in intellectual or mental development:

The word does not relate to a single object, but to an entire group or class of objects. Therefore, every word is a concealed generalisation. From a psychological perspective, word meaning is the first and foremost generalisation. It is not difficult to see that generalisation is a verbal act of thought; its reflection of reality differs radically from that of immediate sensation or perception. (p. 47)

The key to understanding the role of language in intellectual development lies in the dual nature of word meaning or language-in-use; one is the object or phenomenon that the word refers to in the objective reality and the other one is the relationship of the word with other words. Therefore, Vygotskian scholars argue that it is not enough to master the structural rules for language acquisition when learning to read and write that language. Moreover, language acquisition involves producing appropriate words and speech patterns in accordance with communicative and contextual requirements.

In conclusion, this study takes the view that the concepts of ZPD and inner speech are best seen as dialogically interwoven with one another in the act of writing. Vygotsky shows how children could build up their inner voice through interaction with more skilled individual in their ZPD

(Vanderburg, 2006). Inner speech may perform a range of functions in diverse situations, such as self-monitoring, problem-solving, retrieving information from memory, scaffolding, and so on. Clearly, these concepts are useful for me in my analysis of Chinese postgraduate students' academic writing practices.

### **2.1.2 Bakhtinian circle: Dialogue & language**

Just as Vygotskian theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the dialogic nature of inner speech and ZPD, and their dialogic relationship to each other, so too Bakhtin's dialogic theory adds another powerful theoretical underpinning for my research in terms of his theorizing of language, dialogue and social interactions. Most of his theorizing of language, culture and social interactions can be shown as congruent with the works of Vygotsky (see Parr, 2010; Wells, 2000; Wertsch, 1980). His works complement Vygotsky's theory in some aspects as I show and explain in the following section.

#### ***Dialogue***

Truth is not born, nor is it to be found, inside the head or an individual person; it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of dialogic interaction. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110)

In this widely quoted sentence, Bakhtin presents one of his basic perspectives: people's communicative behaviors only "have meaning" and "take on their specific force and weight" in particular social, cultural and linguistic contexts or settings (Dentith, 1995, p. 3). For Bakhtin, "to be means to communicate" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 252). All human activity that constitutes this 'being' is associated with dialogue and social interactions. These interactions only make sense in terms of their particular cultural, historical, social and political contexts. In this sense, Bakhtin's theory exerts a significant influence on some assumptions in SCT which support the view that language is the key to the meaning making of an individual's initial involvement in social and cultural activities, and it later becomes internalized through various dialogic processes (Iddings, Haught, & Devlin, 2005).

Bakhtin's ideas about dialogue are immensely complicated. Typically he does not give a clear and specific definition of dialogue. For him, a full understanding of dialogue is beyond mere to and fro argument and it is more than a "compositionally expressed dialogue" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 49). Rather, it is a special kind of interaction which can involve a variety of



voices. It can be seen as a means of engagement in social life which is intimately bound up with people's mutual relationship between self and others.

For Bakhtin (1981), dialogue is composed of utterances which are links "in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere" (1986, p. 91). This notion of utterance is a key concept in his theory of dialogue; he argues that an utterance is almost unavoidably dialogic. Bakhtin puts much emphasis on the relationship of an utterance with human activity or social situation within which it occurs – that is, the cultural, historical and/or institutional context of the utterance:

However monological the utterance may be (for example, a scientific or philosophical treatise), however much it may concentrate on its own object, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression...The utterance is filled with dialogic overtones. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 92)

Dialogism is a broad term that has been widely used by Bakhtin and Bakhtinian scholars to describe the ways in which a single spoken or written idea in amongst a range of other spoken or written ideas can be understood as an utterance. Bakhtin (1981) was particularly interested in the relationship of one person's utterance with others' utterances. This notion of utterance foregrounds the simultaneity of self and other and the "sharedness" (Iddings, Haught, & Devlin, 2005) of human beings. In this respect, self and other should not be viewed as binary (either-or). Rather, their existence relies on each other.

The speaker and listener are central elements to Bakhtin's (1986) notion of dialogism. In dialogue, the speaker always has (consciously or unconsciously) an "addressee" in mind from whom he/she expects to elicit a response. Moreover, the listener or addressee is always potentially an active respondent. "When the listener perceives and understands the meanings of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude towards it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely and partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution and so on" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68). In this way, the listener can be seen as part of a link in the 'chain' that allows dialogue to continue. With regard to Bakhtin's metaphor of the 'chain', Braxley (2005) argues that the chain has both "temporal" and "spatial" implications because the link of utterances can stretch backwards and forwards in time as well as stretch out to other fields or contexts. Dialogue, he says, "ranges far and wide, through time and space" (p. 13).

This study draws on Parr's (2010) understanding of the term of 'dialogue' as "a dynamic, unstable but ongoing interchange of ideas, meanings, values, and culture" (p. 14). In Bakhtin's later writing, he concedes that although he employs words like utterance, speech, listener and speaker which suggests his interest in spoken communication, his theory applies to all forms of writing and reading as well as to verbal communication more generally (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 69). Thus, Bakhtin's notion of dialogue can apply to an exchange or interchange of utterances between speakers (or within a single speaker), between texts (or within a single text), or between communities (or within a single community). This multi-dimensional application of the notion of dialogue becomes important in my research, when I look into different relationships (e.g., between communities of writers, between the texts they write and those they read) involved in Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing and how these relationships can influence their writing practices.

### *Language*

Many researchers in sociocultural research communities tend to regard language as "not only a cognitive phenomenon, the product of the individual's brain" but also as "fundamentally a social phenomenon, acquired and used interactively, in a variety of contexts for the practical purpose" (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 296). To a large extent, this is congruent with Bakhtin's dialogic theory of language. Language for Bakhtin (1981) is much more than the medium for understanding the self and its extralinguistic contexts. In Bakhtin's view, language is inherently interactive and dialogic. It can never be something that operates in a closed or fixed system because "the word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it, the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 279-280). In this way, language can be seen as a function of multiple influences stemming from a network of personal, psychological, social and cultural interactions. Therefore, people's utterances (ideas within language) are conditioned by the social, historical, cultural, and institutional contexts within a given discourse community. Bakhtin's insights into language are worth quoting at some length:

Language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception for the world. All worlds have a "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and the hour. Each word tastes of the contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions...language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated,

overpopulated with the intentions of others. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 273-274)

Needless to say, this study is not the first to argue that in Bakhtin's philosophy of language, the concept of dialogue occupies a paramount position. Machenkova (2005) argues that for Bakhtin, "dialogue creates the possibility of language; language emerges from dialogue and is its consequences" (p. 175). Dialogue, in Bakhtin's writing, does not merely stand for the verbal exchange between interlocutors. Rather, it is a socially-imbedded meaning-making process in which a person "becomes for the first time what he is" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 252). Therefore, Bakhtin regards language as our most efficient socializing agent and repository of personality (Emerson, 2000).

In this sense, Bakhtin rejects abstract objectivist understandings of language which claim that "language is a pure system of laws governing all phonetic, grammatical and lexical forms that confront individual speakers as inviolable norms over which they have no control" (Bakhtin, as cited in Holquist, 1990, p. 42). Such a view of language gives priority to the "other" and denies the importance of the "self" in meaning making and language learning. Bakhtin is also critical of the individual subjectivist view that all dimensions of language can be clarified in terms of "each individual speaker's voluntarist intentions" (Iddings, Haught & Devlin, 2005, p. 35). Both of these views seem to understand language from a monologic perspective. What Bakhtin accentuates is the "intersubjective" nature of language which underscores the unstable and complex relations between 'self' and 'other'. He argues that "the self and other are always different from one other as occupants of different times and spaces. The self cannot exist without the other; the other is what gives meaning to the self (Iddings, Haught, & Devlin, 2005, p. 36). And so he relates language to the ongoing dialogue of life between individuals as well as between individuals and their social surroundings. In this respect, Bakhtin's theory of language in dialogic contexts closely parallels Vygotsky's theorizing of language in higher mental functioning. For Vygotsky, learning a language is not a matter of assimilation of a new language's patterns. Rather, learners construct a continuously evolving voice by listening to, acting on and transforming the language they hear around them. They construct meanings and make sense of the words within language by negotiating the dissonance with other existing voices. Vygotsky's and Bakhtin's perceptions about language inform and shape the design of this study as I seek to understand how Chinese postgraduate students understand and experience writing in English in their particular learning and scholarly environments.

### *Heteroglossia*

Fundamental to Bakhtin's dialogic theory is the notion of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981). The phenomenon known as heteroglossia assumes that language, culture and any particular voice exist as parts of a greater whole in which there are unceasing interactions between and among voices, languages and cultures. The term heteroglossia begins to take on significant meaning when one considers the range of voices that are engaged in a form of dialogue in a particular context, and the range of related dialogues that draw on and sometimes echo these other voices and dialogues in that context. These different voices may be "juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 291-292). Thus, when L2 writers are writing in English, they can be seen as immersed within and contributing to a heteroglossia of voices. For example, my participants bring to their study various Chinese cultural backgrounds, and whilst in Australia they are having a variety of English learning experiences in diverse academic communities. Each one of them when writing in their discipline needs to draw from and negotiate a heteroglossia of different voices and different scholarly discourses; and they need to bear in mind the different expectations and cultural conventions in different Australian and international academic communities when they are writing a scholarly assignment or a thesis.

In order to better understand the term of 'heteroglossia', I found it helpful to tease out the notion of "ideological being", which refers to people's way of developing their world views and their systems of ideas. Bakhtin explains that the "ideological environment", which is the social context for an individual's development, has a strong influence on the ideological becoming of the individual and the social context (Bakhtin, 1978, p. 14). Such an environment could be any place in our everyday life. The main inherent feature of the ideological environment is the diverse voices involved in it. Not surprisingly, conflicts and tensions between different voices tend to be inevitable in any dialogic ideological environment. In this way, meaning making through language inevitably involves struggle (Bakhtin, 1981). Among the range of voices in people's dialogical activities, Bakhtin (1981) puts forward two categories of voices which people need to grapple with in order to build up their 'ideological being': namely, the authoritative voice/discourse and the internally persuasive voice/discourse (p. 342). According to Bakhtin, the authoritative discourse is often viewed as "a prior discourse" on the grounds that "its authority was already acknowledged in the past" (1981, pp. 342-343). People often struggle against "various kinds and degrees of authority" and against the "official line" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345) when what they believe clashes with some aspects of the official

doctrine in the world. However, although it tends to be “a voice speaking the one point of view that must be attended to”, that voice is not necessarily authoritarian (Morson, 2004, p. 320). In essence, it does not stand for “a voice speaking the truth” (Morson, 2004, p. 320).

In my own English academic writing experiences as a Chinese PhD student in Australia, I have often felt that there was an “authoritative discourse” in the form of some English academic discourses which see language as a set of cultural norms (or grammatical rules). In various ways, these norms have been reinforced by tightly framed academic requirements for particular units I was studying and/or by lecturers who dictated exactly what they expected for an assignment, for instance. Needless to say, like my international peers, I have sometimes struggled to enter into dialogue with such voices. And yet, if I am honest with myself, I have also sometimes struggled with the everyday discourse which Bakhtin names “internally persuasive discourse”. The essential characteristic of an internally persuasive discourse is that it is “subject to change and is constantly interacting with ever-evolving ideologies” (Freeman & Ball, 2004, p. 8). There is a difference in my struggling, though. Unlike authoritative discourse, the internally persuasive discourse does not rely on some notion of a norm; it is “backed by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). In studying at university and as I sought to express and shape my own ideas in my writing, my struggling has involved trying to interact with a variety of discourses as spoken by others and trying to develop my own internally persuasive discourse in the assignments I needed to submit. I feel I have come close to achieving that internally persuasive discourse when I have been able to draw on some of my existing writing practices and styles, which are related both to the requirements of a unit or discipline but still connected in some ways to my own cultural background.

The journey of ideological development and this type of struggle can be understood as an ongoing dialogue. Participants in any dialogue bring to their communication different kinds of knowledge, beliefs, backgrounds, experiences and discourses. The dialogue they engage in involves some kinds of struggles with different conceptual systems, from the speaker’s (or writer’s) viewpoint and from the listener’s (or reader’s) viewpoint, as they seek to create new understandings. In seeking to understand how the Chinese postgraduate student participants deal with differences between others and themselves in their academic writing practices, this study takes a Bakhtinian position that the students are engaged in a dialogue which involves trying to connect with and perhaps challenge the view of the other, rather than trying to prove

the other's view as unconditionally wrong. According to Bakhtin (1981), meaning and understanding are created through struggling with "mutuality of differences". He believes that differences can be seen as the important prerequisite for understanding another culture or another person. Struggling to connect with other discourses and voices can help expand people's understanding of the world and this can help in individual's "coming to ideological consciousness" (1981, p. 348). In the richest, most robust and generative dialogue, people are called upon to appreciate the partiality of their views and to be conscious of the need to re-examine or reflect on their perspectives. In my study, I attempt to inquire into how my participants negotiate similarities with, and differences from, others' voices in their English academic writing and what factors may influence their negotiation of a particular 'ideological being' through their English scholarly writing. Here I would like to point out that this attitude of appreciating the partiality of one's views and the need to continually reflect on one's knowledge and experiences is also an important aspect of my own work as a researcher. I see this as part of the reflexive dimension of my research practices and my thesis writing.

### ***Identity in writing***

Bakhtin has extensively related his dialogic theory to writing, even though he is often talking about writing in novels. He has offered an important philosophy for writing, which Orr (2005) expresses in this way: "What one says, and how one writes, links directly to one's epistemological, ideological fiber, fiber that all the while is socially situated" (p. 56). That is to say, each piece of writing is shaped by a variety of social factors, and it is the product arising from writers' past interactions with others' thoughts and anticipated future interactions. In explaining the act of writing, Bakhtin (1981) invokes the notion of a heteroglossia of ideas and voices. As writers write, they connect with and contribute to this heteroglossia, and they do this in ways that involve a tension between "centripetal" and "centrifugal" discourses in language. Centripetal discourses, he argues, tend to be "monoglossic" and "normative". They aim at a single form of understanding between people, based on a standardized notion of language or a presumed fixed meaning. In contrast, centrifugal discourses encourage diversity and difference in understanding, and can be seen as those things that keep language and culture alive and dynamic. They resist the potential for closure and unification so that new meanings and identities are more likely to be generated. Bakhtin tends to view writing artefacts and writing practices as most dialogic, when they encourage readers to grapple with different points of view, and in the process to encourage a dialogical tussle between self and others. In that way,

written utterances can be linked with utterances previously spoken or sentences previously written by others.

According to Lotman (1988), the most valuable texts incorporate two main functions: the first one is to transmit information in communication, and the second one is to participate in the creation of new meanings. From Bakhtin's perspective, writers should not forget the second transformative function of the written texts. Therefore, rather than focusing on the knowledge of one particular genre, they are encouraged to be aware of the hybridization of genres which means that they should engage in reconciling a diverse range of genres to produce their writing. In that case, the "conscious hybridization" (Bakhtin, 1968) in which people break through the boundaries between genres, languages, or cultures, becomes an indispensable part in language learning and second language writing. Clearly, this has implications for postgraduate researcher-writers, and their aspirations to make a valuable and perhaps new contribution to knowledge in their field. In my own case, this explains why my PhD writing sometimes involves the combining of different forms of scholarly writing, including narrative, analysis, autobiography and reviews of research literature.

Bakhtin's theorizing of culture also plays a crucial role in my examination in this study of a Chinese postgraduate writer's identity issues in L2 writing. Rather than treating culture as static and concrete facts or artefacts (Brooks, 1975; Lafayette, 1978), Bakhtinian researchers (e.g., Liddicoat, 2002) view culture as a highly variable and constantly changing phenomenon. For them, culture is a combination of communication practices which are intimately concerned with language, religion, race, lifestyle, ways of thinking of a particular group of people from a particular historical time and geo-political place. This dynamic approach to culture encourages language learners and writers to negotiate meanings across cultural boundaries and establish one's own identity through engaging in the productive dialogue between old and new understandings about culture (Kramsch, 1993). This notion of dialogic negotiation of meanings across always mutable boundaries has clear connections with Bakhtin's (1981) notion of "heteroglossia", as discussed above.

My interest in exploring Chinese postgraduate students' researcher-writer identity negotiation in English academic writing is inspired by reading of Bakhtin's theory. As a Chinese postgraduate student studying in Australia, I was fascinated when I read Bakhtin's proposal that the first step in engaging with the notion of culture is to "enter into it, forgetting one's own

and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture” (1986). For Bakhtin, this was a step of “empathy”. However, he writes, “one cannot understand understanding as emotional empathy, as the placement of the self in the other’s position (loss of one’s own position). This is required only for peripheral aspects of understanding. One cannot understand understanding as a translation from the other’s language into one’s own” (pp. 6-7). In order to realize the ultimate goal – creative understanding of another’s culture (or a western academic field of study) – Bakhtin might argue that L2 learners should seek to fully “enter into [western academic cultures]” rather than merely developing “emotional empathy” with them (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 54). In his words, “I actively enter as a living being into an individuality, and consequently do not, for a single moment, lose myself completely or lose my singular place outside that individuality” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 93). In this sense, Bakhtin advocates learner’s intercultural capability which requires individuals to simultaneously enter into another culture while in a sense, paradoxically, also remaining outside it. The further I have progressed in my PhD the more I have come to understand academic writing across cultural boundaries in these terms.

Connecting to Bakhtin’s ideas about entering into a target culture, Bhabha (1996) argues for ‘hybridization’ as a new and advanced way of reconciling and negotiating cultural differences (such as those that Chinese students experience when studying and/or researching in Australia). He proposes the notion of a “third space” as an imagined dialogic meeting point in order to negotiate the differences between a target culture and the culture one brings to an experience. Bhabha (1994) argues that the term, a “third space”, is subject to instability and splitting (pp. 98-99, 131) of discourses, knowledge, culture, or even identity which students take up. It resists cultural and language authority and privilege. Students may be confronted with many different kinds of knowledge in a third space, such as home, peers groups, schools, and other systems. In this sense, a third space can be regarded as a productive and helpful scaffold for students to build up a new and strong sense of self through exploring multiple discourses and knowledges from other spaces and seek out connections (not necessarily agreement) where there appear to be only disconnections between others’ ideas and their own.

It is helpful to see the multicultural and plurilinguistic students that populate a ‘third space’ classroom or research group in Australian universities as also involving a wide range of internally persuasive discourses. Each of these discourses, in a sense, may be influencing ‘the ideological becoming’ of all other students. Some students, including international students,



are more willing than others to come to into contact with and struggle with the variety of internally persuasive discourses they encounter in these classrooms and communities. Those who do engage with these internally persuasive discourses tend to see these as potentially valuable sources of ‘new’ discourses and knowledge. In this sense, Bhabha’s (1994) hybridity theory is congruent with Bakhtin’s notion of ideological becoming. It posits that people in any given community draw on different resources and discourses to make sense of the world, and this results in their development of identities characterised by being “in-between” (p. 1). A third space is a good way of avoiding Bakhtin’s two extreme forms of monologism to which Bakhtin himself objects (1984, p. 292). One extreme is to unconditionally deny the existence (and hence the value) of others’ knowledge, discourses and knowledge; and the other extreme is to totally agree with others and attempt to assimilate their knowledge, discourses and identity. In both cases, there is a danger of losing the richness of one’s intellectual integrity and cultural identity.

In my research into English academic writing practices of Chinese postgraduate students, I am interested to explore whether and how they engage in this kind of cultural hybridity, and as L2 learners and writers whether or how their academic writing allows them to acknowledge and engage with the existence of other cultures. In my own experience, as a researcher in the field of Education, I have increasingly tried to transcend the boundaries between self and others, and actively engage in ongoing dialogue with others. But I did not know how much this might be possible for students working in other disciplines like Engineering or Computer Science. Would it be possible for them to ‘enter into’ another consciousness in an imagined dialogic meeting point – a ‘third space’? Dialogic scholars argue that this space of in-between-ness provides a democratic and rich learning environment (Moje, Ciechamowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo & Collazo, 2004), but I wondered to what extent this might have been a part of my participants’ writing experiences and practices. What is more, I was interested to learn how a variety of discourses and voices, including both authoritative voices and internally persuasive voices, might encourage their negotiating and mediating of practices and identities.

### **2.1.3 Conclusion: Comparison of Bakhtinian & Vygotskian framing of language learning** *From the perspective of ‘language’*

In the above discussion, I have shown how Vygotsky has presented a more holistic perspective on language than traditional views such as those which see it as a closed system of structures

and norms. For Vygotsky, language plays a central role in intellectual processes that involve transitions from an intrapersonal to an interpersonal level and back again to an intrapersonal level. Taking this idea further, external speech, such as social communication between the self and other, helps activate the sense of a word and of ideas in an individual's mind. Inner speech, which in effect explores connections and interactions with others also gives sense to words and helps to clarify the words in the individual's mind. It is a significant psychological tool for people's higher mental development such as is required in the kinds of thesis or other scholarly writing that participating researcher-writers in this study are required to do. Bakhtin shares with Vygotsky the basic idea that language is not an abstract system of linguistic norms, but rather a crucial medium and tool for communication and thought development. Moreover, Bakhtin's theory about language can be positioned, as I have discussed in this chapter, as an extension of Vygotsky's theory. Bakhtin expands the notion of language being composed of 'words' and 'knowledge' and 'culture' that do not come out of a dictionary or textbook or scholarly article, but which do exist as "utterances" (Postholm, 2007) that combine with other utterances in the dialogue of academic worlds. Bakhtin believes that any genuine utterance anticipates a response to the utterance, and each utterance is a moment in a chain of innumerable utterances (1986). His detailed theorizing of dialogue and 'utterance' allows me as a researcher to investigate and better understand the ways my Chinese student participants write and communicate through the written words in their university studies and research in Australia.

### ***From the perspective of 'inner speech'***

Vygotsky believes that human mental functions originate in internal forms, and are activated in external social interactions; in higher order mental functions, these are transformed into an individual's intrapersonal understanding. Vygotsky offers a basic framework for understanding transitions from other-regulation to self-regulation (Buzzelli, 1995). Inner speech, for Vygotsky, is "speech for oneself" (1986, p. 225), representing potentially an individual's highest level of self-regulation (Buzzelli, 1995). Both Vygotsky and Bakhtin speak of inner speech, but Bakhtin complements it by putting forward the notion of "inner dialogue" (see Johnson, 2004). Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia helps to explain that inner dialogue is not only concerned with the dialogue with oneself but also with others simultaneously because any individual self, identity, or voice should always be seen as fundamentally in dialogue with others' voices.

### ***From the perspective of ‘assimilation’***

Although Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory can be seen to ‘speak to’ the dialogic and social nature of higher forms of cognition, his concept of internalization is far from enough to clearly spell out how learners’ mental functioning is related to others’ voices and to the broader cultural, historical, and institutional contexts (Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999; Hoel, 1997). In this respect, Bakhtin specifies the link between the mediation process and learners’ historical and cultural surroundings. The assimilation of dialogue theory from Bakhtinian theory can build a valuable extension of Vygotsky’s theory. Bakhtin (1981) explains the process of assimilation in a school context in his home country of Russia,

...in schools, two basic models are recognized for the appropriation and transmission – simultaneously – of another’s words (a text, a rule, a model): “reciting by heart” and “retelling in one’s own words”. (p. 341)

Bakhtin’s reference to “reciting by heart” links with Vygotsky’s notion of internalization which is related to the process of assimilation merely based on others’ thoughts and beliefs rather than their own. On the other hand, his phrase “retelling in one’s own words” reminds me of his notion of the individual’s internally persuasive discourse in which the individual struggles with and negotiations to respond to others’ voices (Buzzelli, 1995).

### ***From the perspective of ‘social interactions’ and ‘dialogue’***

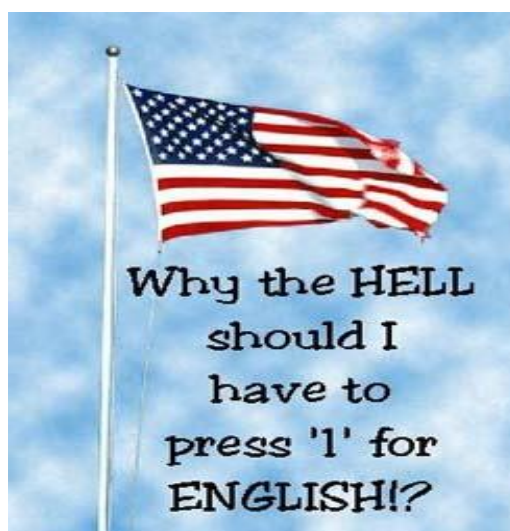
Marchenkova (2005) links Bakhtin’s theory of social interactions and that of Vygotsky through commenting on their similarity and difference: for him, the similarity lies in the process of communication or interaction during participants’ learning. The difference, on the other hand, arises from the status of the learners. Bakhtinian theory suggests communication of equals who may equally contribute in their dialogue while Vygotsky addresses the inequality between expert and novice. For example, Vygotsky’s ZPD stresses the hierarchical relation between dialogue participants due to the expert’s asymmetry of the knowledge reservoir. Therefore, the expert tends to authoritatively guide the learning process (Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999).

Although both Bakhtin and Vygotsky offer helpful complementary perspectives on dialogic learning and meaning making, there are some differences and divergences between their theories. For Vygotsky, the main purpose of dialogic negotiation is congruence and consensus which call for the need for interlocutors to occupy the same epistemological space (Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999). However, Bakhtin makes explicit that people engaged in dialogue, perhaps especially in an academic dialogue such as in the interactions between a lecturer and his/her

students, are obliged to struggle with differences and misunderstandings. The crucial point, here, is that it is through struggling with these differences and misunderstandings that new understandings can be formed, but that those new understandings may still provoke further rich dialogue. As Cheyne and Tarulli points out, the value of these new understandings “is not necessarily measured in consensus” (1999, p. 89).

In conclusion, many researchers and scholars have explored the connections, contrasts and comparisons between Bakhtin’s and Vygotsky’s theories to investigate educational practices and experiences. Although unique each in their own way, the legacies of Bakhtin and Vygotsky are compatible and can be used in conjunction with each other in useful ways. In my research, the combination of Bakhtin’s dialogic theory and Vygotsky’s SCT offers a powerful theoretical framework to explore insights and experiences of a small selection of Chinese postgraduate students’ English academic writing practices. Due to my research participants’ Chinese background and the fact that most of their early English learning experience happened in China, the following section reviews theories concerned with World Englishes and China Englishes.

## **2.2 World Englishes and identity**



The first time I saw this picture was ten years ago when I was in China, before I came to Australia. I don’t remember what I felt about it at the time. I suspect that I dismissed it as the kind of extreme ideas that sometimes appear in online memes. I came across the same picture some years later on the internet while I was pursuing my Master’s degree in Australia. This time, the picture suddenly triggered my thinking about the dominant status of the English language in our everyday life. When my parents visited me from China, I remember purchasing different China phone cards for them – with titles such as “Hello China” and “Rainbow” – so

that they could contact their friends in China while they were here with me. They cannot speak English, so I had to explain to them how to use the card: that they had to ‘press two’ for the Chinese language option, and so on. They looked confused and even a bit of disappointed. I recall my father asking me, “Why do we need to press two rather than one? Surely, it is a phone card for Chinese people?” I smiled. I had wondered the same thing years ago when I had first used this kind of phone card. I thought at the time that I was the only one sensitive to this.

I enjoy and have always enjoyed learning about and using the English language. It is probably fair to say that this has been an ongoing passion in my life – both academic and personal – for many years now. However, I remain uncomfortable about some of the ways in which the growth of English’s hegemonic power in these globalizing times has resulted in domination of some other languages; and it has sometimes resulted in the oppression of non-English speaking cultures across the world. In the following, I inquire into the global status of English and some problematic implications of this in today’s globalizing world.

### **2.2.1 Globalization and World Englishes**

Globalization is a term used most often to summarize the complex phenomena associated with broadening, speeding up, strengthening, and intensifying influences of worldwide interconnectedness (Hu, 2005). A huge body of literature about globalization has described and analyzed a variety of consequences since the 1990s. It is widely agreed that globalization has exerted a crucial influence upon national and international economies, societies, politics and cultures in recent decades (e.g., Waters, 2001). The wide use of the English language as a *lingua franca* has facilitated information flows and the centralizing of financial markets in the context of accelerating globalization. Some scholars (e.g., Clyne & Sharifian, 2008; Yano, 2001) argue that the development of World Englishes is to a large extent due to the forces of globalization because globalizing movements have provided people with a shared context in which to call for a singular international language. Along with the growing sense of the global status of English, more and more countries have formally bestowed a priority on English, and increasing numbers of people are eager to learn/use English for different purposes (including personal, academic and business).

Some scholars and researchers advocate for English as a global *lingua franca* and believe that the global spread of English could help to remove the barriers to international communication

and they see the movement toward a monolingual world as having benefits for the whole world. Pennycook (1995), while aware of the hegemonic dominance of English and the problems this creates, concedes that “the spread of English is taken to be natural, neutral and beneficial” (p. 54). With the ever-increasing number of English speakers/users in a growing number of regions in the world, Pennycook and many scholars and linguists (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999) argue that one singular ‘English’ is not adequate to describe the current English learning/using dynamic. In an effort to make sense of this complex situation, Kachru (1986) thirty years ago graphically represented ‘World Englishes’ as a dynamic of three circles (see Figure 2.1 below): the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle.

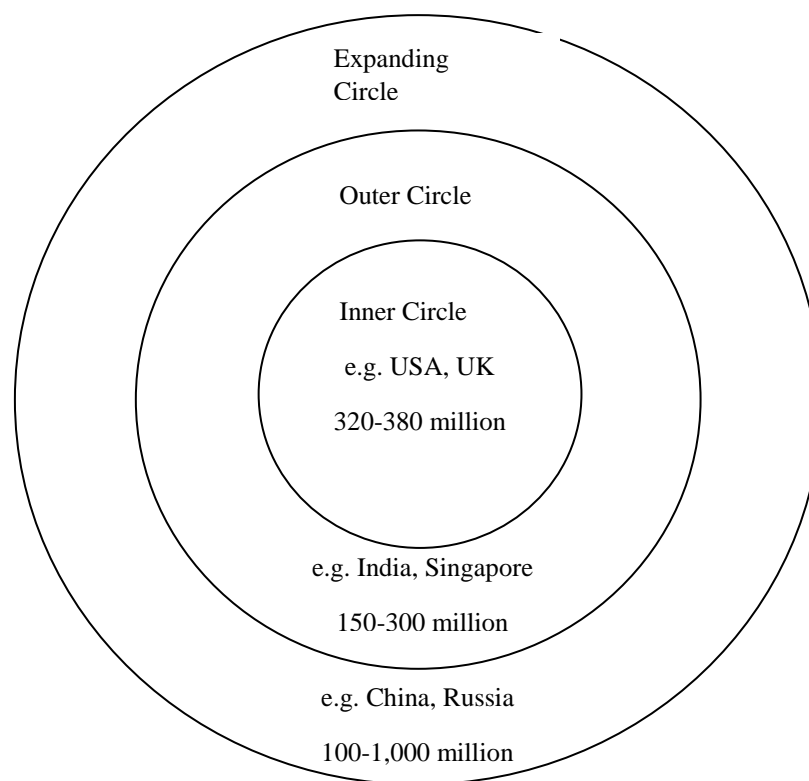


Figure 2.1 The three circles of English (Kachru, 1986)

Kachru (1992) argued that the three circles “represent the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the foundational allocation of Englishes into diverse cultural contexts (p. 356). The first category, he suggested, consists of inner-circle countries where English is the mother tongue, such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. However, more recent research has shown that even among these countries it is evident that speakers speak and write different varieties of English in their own cultural contexts (Shelton, 2007). For example, the

American English is strikingly different from that of Australia in term of pronunciation, lexicon, grammar and cultural factors, and even within the US and Australia there is a huge range of ways in which English is spoken, written and communicated. Some taken-for-granted concepts like ‘mother tongue’ have been robustly discussed in the years since Kachru first published his three circles model. The next circle moving outward is the second category, labelled as the ‘Outer Circle’ where English is supposedly used as a “second language”. Countries belonging to Kachru’s notion of the Outer Circle included countries that had formerly been (and sometimes were still currently) American and British colonies, such as India, Singapore, Philippines, Tanzania, Zambia, and other Caribbean countries. But this simple categorization has also been critiqued. For instance, due to the extensive use of English in these countries by different cultural groups even within the country, they have already formed an ‘impressive’ array of variations of English which have been labelled by linguists using hybrid language such as Standard Indian English, Standard Singapore English, and so on (Shelton, 2007). For the countries which Kachru (1986) characterized as only speaking English when learning it as a foreign language, he labelled them as belonging to the Expanding Circle, thus positioned them on the periphery of his model. He cited countries like China, Indonesia, Japan, and Russia as examples of Expanding Circle countries. According to Kachru, at least at the time he published his original model, these countries had no history of colonization by members of the Inner Circle countries; in these countries, English did not seem to have any official status. It was mainly used for educational purposes, but there was some acknowledgement that English had value in communication across national borders (Graddol, 1997). And yet, for example, the primary role of English in China, where it is one of only three compulsory subjects for all students to study, its importance is surely understated by suggesting it does not have any official status outside education.

Despite its many failings, Kachru’s publication of his circles model of World Englishes prompted (perhaps unintentionally) widespread questioning of the previous view of English as a single homogeneous language across the globe. In subsequent years, investigation into the concept of World Englishes has benefited from Bakhtin’s theorizing of the dialogic nature of language and culture. The existence of variations, and dialogically related versions, of English has been acknowledged by researchers and educators across the world. Some of the more compelling research sees the spread of English raising serious questions about injustice and imperialism (Ives, 2009; Jordão, 2009). For example, Tollefson elaborates on the growing influence of the notion of World Englishes by stating that “at a time when English is widely

seen as a key to the economic success of nations and the economic well-being of individuals, the spread of English also contributes to significant social, political and economic inequalities” (as cited by Pennycook, 2005, p. 4). Philipson (1992) uses the term of “linguistic imperialism” to explain this phenomenon. He claims that developed English speaking countries use English to maintain their dominance over developing countries through “the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages” (p. 47). Other researchers, though, challenge the theory of ‘linguistic imperialism’ as Philipson has explained it. Brutt-Giffler (2002), for instance, argues that Philipson’s focus on middle class, predominantly white countries, “obscures the role of Africans, Asians, and other people of the world as active agents in the process of creation of world” (Brutt-Giffler, 2002, p. 107). This line of argument seeks to recognize the agency of speakers of English in places like Africa and Asia who are presented in linguistically deficit ways by notions such as ‘linguistic imperialism’.

Although English as a *lingua franca* is by definition a language without national boundaries, or with as many homelands as there are users of it (Jenkins, 2003), there is still a widespread assumption in the literature that the English language still belongs to so-called ‘native speakers’ in the so-called Inner Circle countries, or at least that English ‘belongs’ more to these ‘native speakers’ than other speakers in Kachru’s representation of Outer Circle or Expanding Circle countries (Jordão, 2009). Using the concept of native speakers of English, Kachru (1986) claimed that the Inner Circle countries enjoy a certain ‘ownership’ of English, and he suggested that this was *norm providing*, while the Outer Circle countries could be regarded as *norm developing* and the Expanding Circle countries were *norm dependent*. In this sense, English used in the Inner Circle countries was regarded as the standard language, ‘the norm’. It should not be surprising that researchers using Kachru’s model were attracted to the binary notions which neatly separated ‘native’ English and ‘Standard English’ from ‘non-native’ English, which was non-standard therefore ‘deficit’. Some researchers, for example Quirk (1990), have argued against the use of non-native varieties of English as pedagogically acceptable models because they say that these varieties are not adequately and clearly described and explained. Relying on unquestioned binaries between native and non-native language users, Quirk (1990) claimed that only the ‘native’ model of English should be taken up when teaching in non-native contexts, and where non-native teachers should be in constant touch with the native language. Needless to say, these kinds of perspectives have influenced many educators’ pedagogy in teaching English as a second language. International students studying outside of their home



country have often sought to develop their English language knowledge and skills by emulating so-called native English speaker norms of language, and adopting the various cultural norms closely associated with linguistic norms. For example, Pallu's (2008) study of international students wanting to learn English while in Brazil, show them seeking out and attempting to emulate English or American norms, and putting their trust in native speakers rather than specialist educators. Jordão (2009) also found that Latin American state schools, students and teachers are inclined to take native-English speakers as a model for their learning reference. These phenomena are replicated in countries across the world, including Australia.

Many researchers (Canagarajah, 2006; Shelton, 2007) are not at all comfortable with the view of linguistic norms and standard forms of English, and they rigorously contest the ideology of 'native speakers'. According to Cui (2006), the concept of 'Standard English' is best seen as fluid and dynamic due to the existence of various regional and national 'standards' of language. Canagarajah (2006) observes how Kachru's Expanding Circle countries are trying to cast off the yoke of 'linguistic imperialism' and develop new norms for their English usage and study nowadays. Across the world, multilingual (or plurilingual) speakers invariably speak English in their own ways and communicate in English without necessarily deferring to inner-circle norms (Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004, cited in Canagarajah, 2006).

With regard to the teaching and learning of World Englishes, Escobar (2004) suggests that rather than employing an 'either and or' approach to language – for example, Standard or non-standard English, native English speaker or non-native English speaker – it is more appropriate to think in terms of 'this and that' version of English and to open up for consideration multiple meanings of language in different cultural and geographic settings. Therefore, people in multicultural communities may need to learn from heterogeneity rather always seek to reduce and suppress the diversity of the English language to a singular rigid entity. Yano (2001) argues that the institutionalized varieties of English in what Kachru had called Outer Circle countries should be accepted and legitimized as comparable with the 'Standard English' in the Inner Circle countries. In what might otherwise be called non-native contexts, successful language teaching takes into account the "relationship between forms that English manifests and its speakers' perception of reality and the nature of their cultural institutions" (Bhatt, 1995, p. 247). In this sense, L2 learners and writers of English can benefit from transferring their home languages' pragmatic norms and cultures into their target languages, resulting in new and ever evolving varieties of English (Graddol, 2006).

In the following, I focus on contemporary trends of creating and developing China Englishes which in my study is seen to address the ever-changing and dynamic nature of English language development as it is experienced by people such as the Chinese postgraduate students studying in Australia who are the participants in my study.

### **2.2.2 Development of varieties of ‘China Englishes’**

Schneider (2003) has suggested five phrases for the development of new Englishes, and he believes that “in principle, it should be possible to apply the model to most, ideally all of the Englishes around the globe” (2003, p. 256). The first phase refers to the ‘*foundation*’ phase. It takes place when English arrives in a place where English speakers settle. The second phase he identifies is ‘*exonormative stabilization*’. In this phase, regardless of some distinction between the English spoken by the settlers and the variety spoken by the local people, English learners in the country are inclined to take the variety imported by settlers as the model. The third phase – ‘*nativisation*’ – could be considered as the most important and dynamic because it “results in the heaviest effect on the restructuring of the English language itself” (Schneider, 2003, p. 248). During this phase, English learners become aware of building up a new identity through restructuring some important elements of the English language, such as vocabulary, grammar, and so on. The fourth phase is marked by the use of local varieties of English as accepted norms. Schneider calls the last phase ‘*differentiation*’. At this stage, English learners’ integration of the local varieties of English becomes mature and reflects local identities and cultures.

Schneider’s conceptualizing of the development of new Englishes shows that the varieties of English spoken by settlers keeps changing due to continuous contact with local cultures and languages. Rather than being inferior, the new local varieties tend to be gradually accepted and institutionalized (see also Kirkpatrick, 2007). However, as attractive as Schneider’s simple phases may be, it is problematic to pin down a particular model to explain the process of the development of new varieties of English. Different varieties may emerge in different ways due to the multifarious characteristics of the local language, the people and groups who are learning and using English as a second language, and the environment this learning and using is embedded in. Certainly this is the case for China Englishes. China has a long history of contact with English language which dates back to the seventeenth century (Chen & Hu, 2006). It has a huge population of English learners and users: about 350 million people out of 1.3 billion are learning and using English in different situations, for various purposes and at different levels,

and the number is still growing at a remarkable rate nowadays (Liu & Yu, 2006).

As stated earlier, learning English is widely prioritized in Chinese schools and businesses, and more and more educators and scholars can be seen looking for a singular and effective model or approach for English teaching and learning in China. Ge (1980) was one of the first to coin the concept of ‘China English’ in the early 1980s. A decade later, Li (1993) provided a more specific and comprehensive definition of China English as a variety of English based on native English norms and adapted to express Chinese cultures. He suggested that China English reflected many Chinese linguistic characteristics in terms of lexis, sentence structure, and discourse pattern, but these characteristics did not ‘interfere’ with the clarity of the English being communicated. Although Li’s 1993 definition was important in pointing out some important elements concerned with China English, it ignored the ever-changing and dialogic nature of any language. My own study takes the view that ‘China English’ exists as various local varieties of Englishes because of the dialogic, mutually influencing, relationship between the language varieties and the particular contexts in which English is used and developed. For example, people from Hong Kong and people from Beijing speak different varieties of English in terms of pronunciation and sentence structure. Therefore, in my study, I prefer to use the term of ‘China Englishes’ rather than Ge’s ‘China English’. Although English learners in China have a long attachment to American or British English models, in more recent research there has been a shift away from an Inner Circle English model to a model based on China Englishes (Horner & Lu, 2006). With the wide popularity of China Englishes, one closely relevant issue, cultural identity needs to be considered in my review of relevant literature for this PhD. I discuss this issue in the next section.

### **2.2.3 Cultural identity in English learning and writing**

Wei and Fei (2003), who research in the area of ESL learning and writing, conceptualize language as having dual characters: it is both a tool for communication and a carrier of culture. This conception is interesting in drawing attention to the relevance of culture in discussions about language, but it suggests that language exists *outside of communication* (a tool) and *in addition to culture* (a carrier). For cultural theorists such as Raymond Williams, language is more fundamental than this; it pre-exists communication and culture. As Williams says, language is fundamental to our very humanity (Williams, 1981). He and Bakhtin (1981) conceptualize language as both informing and being informed by social and cultural activity and dialogue or communication. Therefore, a better understanding of different varieties of

Englishes requires a close consideration of culture – for example, the cultural background of English speakers and writers, the culture within which English is being spoken and written, and the impact of these considerations on the identity of English speakers and writers.

25 years ago, Hofstede (1986) proposed four dimensions of cultural differences: individualism/collectivism, power distance, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Ten years later, in order to build up the rigor of his cultural classification system and to address his notion of the “eastern mind” in comparison with the “western mind”, Hofstede (1997) suggested a further dimension, “Confucian work dynamism” to add to the first four (pp. 159-174). The long traditions of Confucianism with the themes of harmony and collectivism has been deeply rooted in many Asian students’ minds and, Hofstede argues, it exerts an overriding influence on their writing styles and rhetorical discourse. Other researchers, such as Markus and Kitayma (1991), also identify fundamental differences in views between western cultures and non-western cultures. They claim that many western cultures encourage people to become independent from others and to focus on building up individuality based on a person’s own feelings and actions. In contrast, Markus and Kitayma assert, people involved in non-western culture place a high priority on the interdependence among individuals, and they tend to behave in ways that are mainly responsive to others’ thoughts and actions.

Due to these supposed differences, concerns about “cultural bias” (Tan, 2000, p. 15) become salient for many L2 learners. For example, when seeking to understand Ferguson’s (1999) argument, that “learning to write is a part of learning to be a member of a culture, and cultural knowledge and experience are realized in both the content and the form of written work” (p. 32), some L2 learners of English may be desperate to appear a member of what they see as the target English speaking culture. And they may feel that they can only do this by sacrificing their native culture and personal voice in their English speaking and writing. They may have felt they have only limited potential to be themselves in this new language they are learning; they must hide their cultural background, and suppress their personal voice in their speaking and writing in order to fit in with what they see as the standards and norms of English-speaking cultures.

However, since language and culture play an essential role in marking out and maintaining people’s identity (Hall 1997), other research has shown how vital it is for L2 learners to give prominence to their cultural identity when communicating in English. Referring specifically to

L2 writers in academic contexts, Canagarajah (2002) points out that instead of effacing or removing the L2 writers' home culture in their writing, their cultural distinctiveness and peculiarities should be appreciated because they could enrich the multicultural academic community they are entering into. Focusing on the benefits to the individual L2 writers, Louie (2005) believes that they should try to develop their "meta-cultural sensitivity" while acculturating into the new academic environment in order to shape their own identities in their writing (p. 24). A similar view is articulated by Liddicoat (1997), who suggests that L2 writers ought to be aware of their first culture, the target culture, and the discourse community when producing texts. These arguments can be seen to link to Bhabha's (1994) notion of a 'third space' and Bakhtin's (1981) theorizing of the dialogic nature of language, as outlined in section 2.1 of this chapter. It also links to Gee's (2000) claim that the notion of identity, which is always changeable and dynamic, is an important analytic tool for understanding educational work and culture. Gee shows that there is a great variety of factors that may influence a person's identity when they are aware of the cultures they are bridging and the discourse communities they are entering, as Liddicoat suggests. In my research, I attempt to investigate Chinese postgraduate students' understandings and approaching of China Englishes and how they grapple with their Chinese cultural identity in English academic writing.

As my research looks into Chinese postgraduate students' grappling with establishing their identity while learning to use varieties of English appropriate to their particular academic discipline, in the following section I talk about the identity framework which I use in this study to analyze the students' identity work as developing writers of academic English.

#### **2.2.4 Identity framework**

All our writing is influenced by our life histories. Each word we write represents an encounter, possibly a struggle, between our multiple past experience and the demands of a new context. Writing is not some neutral activity which we just learn like a physical skill, but it implicates every fibre of the writer's multifaceted being. (Ivanič, 1998, p. 181)

Language, according to Waterstone (2008), is not a transparent conduit for meanings to be produced by people. But rather, language is situated in historical, cultural, institutional, and social contexts in which meanings are constructed and contested (see also Lea, 2005). Therefore, it is helpful to see "language acquisition [as] not located in the head of the individual but ... situated in the dialogic interaction that arises between individuals engaged in goal-

directed activities” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995, p. 110). This view of language acknowledges that when students participate in academic discourse, they do not mechanically take up some ready-made and fixed social position which enables them, for instance, to write a postgraduate thesis. Rather, in all aspects of their work as postgraduate students they are engaged in ongoing and active practices of “positioning” of themselves (Giddens, 1984, p. 84) within a range of often quite diverse communities. Therefore, it becomes paramount to understand how student writers negotiate conflicting identities when they struggle to appropriate academic discourses and cultures (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). My study looks into how Chinese postgraduate students engage in a “constant, agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating and accommodating” (Hall, 1996, p. 14) their cultural and academic identity positions in English writing.

Appreciating the complication of the notion of identity and its relationship to language and culture, Gee (2000) has sketched out four ways to view identity which I draw on when I explore the issue of researcher-writer identity in my research. Gee’s model of identity is suitable for my research for the following reasons. First of all, I endorse Gee’s discussion of the significance of identity in contemporary social and educational spaces. Gee works on the notion of identity from a broader perspective, which is bound up with society and literature. He sees identity as having a combination of cultural, social, and institutional meanings in any educational endeavour, and he vigorously rejects the possibility of studying identity according to pre-existing and rigid cultural categories. Gee’s ‘model’ of identity discusses how identities are tied to the working of natural (or genetic), historical, institutional, and affinity perspectives. Importantly, he highlights that the four perspectives are not mutually exclusive categories. Rather, they interrelate and communicate with each other in theory and in practice at any given time and place. In my study, I draw on some ideas from the four perspectives to discuss how my Chinese participants negotiate and sustain their researcher-writer identity in their English academic writing. The four perspectives are woven together to explain why they think, write and act in particular ways in particular contexts. However, as my research focuses on Chinese postgraduate students’ English academic writing in particular, I modify Gee’s model to some extent to make it more suitable for my research. For example, as each of Gee’s four categories is broad in terms of what factors are developed by the particular source of power, I choose to concentrate on a few factors from each category, which I see as more strongly influencing Chinese researcher-writer identity work. In the following, I explain each category from Gee’s identity framework and at the same time show how each category is applied to my research.

The first category, according to Gee (2000), is *the nature perspective* (or N-Identity). It is a perspective developed from nature, such as through one's genes which are inherited biologically. In this sense, this perspective on identity unfolds outside a person's direct control and outside of the control of society or a particular institution. However, as Gee also argues that N-identities might gain their force and become meaningful through the work of institutions, social work, discourse and dialogue. Regarding my research topic, I try to identify from my interviews with the participants some of these nature factors (e.g., what they see as their personal qualities) that might influence Chinese postgraduate students' identity work, and how the students grapple with some of these natural forces in their English academic writing practices.

The second category on identity Gee labelled *the institutional perspective* (or I-Identities). The strongest source of influence for this aspect of identity is the institution (or often institutions) in which a person is working or operating. That influence will be felt most strongly through the laws, rules, traditions, principles or perhaps vision statements of a particular institution. I will explain this concept further with reference to one participant from my own study. Ada is a Chinese PhD student studying in the Faculty of Education of an Australian university, and I am interested in the ways the "institutional perspective" of her identity speaks to her overall identity and how this influences her English academic writing. In other words, in the course of her working in that faculty, how does she respond to the roles expected of a PhD student, especially an international PhD student? Does the way in which language is spoken about in that faculty, such as in assessment items, encourage her to follow standardised norms of language? Is the version of English that she speaks and writes welcomed or seen in deficit terms by the higher degree regulatory body in the faculty or by her supervisor? How do all of the answers to these questions influence her academic writing practices? In addition, all of my participants, before they come to Australia, also have a particular "position" in their previous educational institutions in their home country – China. I am also interested in the traditions and requirements regarding their English academic writing that go with their previous "position".

The third category Gee labels *the discursive perspective* (or D-Identities). Different from the above two kinds of identity categories, the power of D-Identities is neither nature nor an institution. It relates to the ways in which academic groups help to form accepted ways of developing rational arguments and logic. Thus, Gee's notion of the "rational individual" comes through individuals' engagement with the discourses or dialogue of other people (Gee, 2000,

p. 103). For example, in my study I am interested in the kind of dialogue and discussion that my participants are accustomed to having with supervisors or colleagues about English academic writing, and how this influences their D-Identity and their overall identity.

The last category on identity Gee calls *the affinity perspective* (or A-Identities). The source of power that mediates this perspective is a set of distinctive social practices that are shared by members of a culturally defined discourse group – Gee (2000) calls these practices that are shared within an “affinity group”. He defines the affinity group as people who may be quite diverse and different in many ways, but share an interest in some crucial aspects of their lives and this often emerges as shared “distinctive social practices” (p. 105). In my study these could be academic conversations with other international PhD students and participating in scholarly dialogue with reviewers.

In addition to Gee’s identity framework, I also draw on some important aspects of Ivanič’s framework of writers’ identity. In Ivanič’s (1997) landmark research on writing and identity of novice academic writers, she finds that writers’ identity construction is primarily influenced by their communication resources and social factors. Moreover, in ways that are similar to Gee, Ivanič argues that academics’ identity cannot be easily separated from the identities of other academics they mix with. Based on his research, Ivanič (1997) has proposed an analytical framework concerning four interrelated dimensions of writer identity: authorial self, autobiographical self, discorsal self and possibilities for selfhood. The first three aspects are concerned with the influence of writers’ prior life history and their current discourse community on their writing practice as well as their sense of self as authority in their academic writing. I particularly draw on the first three aspects to explore the researcher-writer identity work that my participants engage in during the course of their postgraduate study and particularly when producing academic texts.

I want to conclude this discussion of the role of identity in my study, by reiterating that when I examine my participants’ negotiation of their researcher-writer identity in their English scholarly writing, I do not fixate upon different identity perspectives separately or as discrete concepts. Rather, I try to show how a combination of different categories contributes to the complex and “certain kind[s] of person” (Gee, 2000, p. 110) whose cases I present in Part Four of this thesis. In the next literature review chapter, I critically review some traditional and



newer pedagogical approaches to L2 teaching and writing practices as well as some significant and emerging research into L2 writing.

## Chapter 3 L2 Teaching and Writing Practices

### 3.1 Pedagogical approaches to L2 and L2 Writing

Having probed a range of conceptual and theoretical ideas associated with language, the English language in particular, and the relevance of identity to learning language, this second literature review moves to a focus on the practical. I examine some of the many pedagogies and learning approaches that are written about in the literature on contemporary L2 teaching and learning in general and L2 writing in particular. The foundations of these approaches are often grounded on different views of what language is and different philosophies about how language is learned (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). In this section, I briefly discuss three groups of approaches to teaching and learning L2: grammar-based approaches; Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches; and Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT) approaches. Since my research particularly focuses on Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing, I also examine three groups of approaches to L2 writing in higher education: skills approaches; process-influenced approaches; and New Literacy Studies (NLS) approaches. The following critical review is by necessity brief, but it engages with the basic ideas from each of these approaches.

#### 3.1.1 Grammar-oriented approaches and skills approaches

##### *Grammar-oriented approaches*

In my experience, and this is supported by some of the literature, language teachers who advocate a traditional grammar-oriented paradigm of learning a second language typically believe that the best way is to concentrate on building learners' knowledge of grammar. This derives from understanding language as a closed system composed of finite structures, in the form of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Richard (1988) has categorized grammar-oriented approaches into four main groups: grammar-translation; audiolingual; cognitive; and what he calls the "direct method". He concedes that although these teaching approaches have their distinctive differences, they all share the common belief that "grammar is the foundation upon which language should be taught" (p. 12). The basic core of most grammar-oriented approaches tends to be teachers' didactic instruction of grammatical rules of the target language and students' engaging in spoken and written drills that practice sentence-level mechanics (Paulson, 1970). These tend to involve imitation, repetition, and memorization activities.

Although grammar-based approaches are still widely practiced and advocated by many practitioners (e.g., Anderson 2005; Fu, 2003) not all teachers and educators embrace them enthusiastically. For example, Weaver, McNally and Moerman (2010) (see also Huang, 2010) have critiqued traditional grammar-based teaching approaches, because they do not help students to apply their grammar knowledge to writing performance. To take another example, Dannels (2003) has robustly questioned the value of ‘direct method’ because it is too dogmatic and inflexible, and their prescriptions for effective L2 teaching and learning tend to ignore the diversity of students in terms of their different learning habits, backgrounds and proficiency levels.

### ***Skills approaches***

The particular type of approaches to learning to write known as ‘skills approaches’ seem to conform to the tenets of grammar-oriented approaches to a large extent. A skills approach looks at learning to write as acquiring a range of atomized *skills* concerned with literacy learning, which are presumed be easily transferable across diverse contexts (Lea & Street, 1998). For skills approaches, learning to write in a different language is concerned with collecting together a repertoire of words, phrases, clauses and sentences which communicate the writer’s ideas but have nothing to do with the context and identity of the reader or listener or the context in which these words, phrases, clauses and sentences might be spoken or written. The final product in a skills approach is the sum of a writer’s mastery of vocabulary repertoire, lexical and syntax patterns, and grammatical knowledge. Badger and White (2000) talk about the four ‘stages’ that produce a final product as follows:

Table 3.1 Four-stage model for learning academic writing using skills approaches (Badger & White, 2000, p. 153)

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Familiarization – learners become familiar with some specific grammar and vocabulary within a text.</li> <li>2. Controlled writing – a substitution template is employed for learners to manipulate some pre-existing framework or fixed patterns.</li> <li>3. Guided writing – student learners imitate exemplars given by teachers.</li> <li>4. Free writing – learners learn and apply what are seen as risk-free language structures in the production of written products.</li> </ol> |
|--|

Skills approaches to teaching are widely used in L2 writing classrooms because these non-native English speaking students who are not confident participants in the dominant culture,

and language structures and writing conventions could benefit from the ‘explicit’ instruction of pre-existing linguistic structures to facilitate writing (Bakry & Alsamadani, 2015; Grami, 2010). However, Hyland (2003) criticizes this model arguing that heavy reliance on memorization and imitation of formal syntactic structures hinders L2 students from developing their expressive ability. Another common critique is that skills approaches pay little attention to the various situations in which writing takes place (see Coffin et al., 2003), and thus they ignore the specificity of different communicative purposes and different audiences. Since writing in authentic contexts is usually a response to a specific communicative purpose and different audience, reliance on decontextualized language skills cannot guarantee the quality of written products. Thus, over recent years, L2 teaching pedagogy has moved toward enabling students to apply linguistic knowledge for particular contexts and has highlighted the ‘communicative function’ of language and the ‘process’ of writing, which I discuss in the next section.

### **3.1.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches and process-oriented approaches**

#### ***CLT approaches***

How can we help the child learn a language?

Believe that your child can understand more than he or she can say, and seek, above all, to communicate. To understand and to be understood. To keep your mind fixed on the same target. In doing that, you will, without thinking about it, make 100 or maybe 1000 alterations in your speech and action. Do not try to practice them as such. There is no set of rules of how to talk to a child that can even approach what you unconsciously know. If you concentrate on communicating, everything else will follow. (Brown, 1973, p. 26)

The notion of communicative language learning was first mooted in the 1970s. In the above quote, Brown shows how CLT derives from theories of language as communication. Writing in the next decade, Seaton (1982) was still foregrounding this: “Language is communication, the intimation to another being of what one wants and thinks; language is activity, basically of four kinds (listening, speaking, reading and writing), as well as body language and semiology” (p. 86) (see also Canale, 2014). Rather than focusing on the mastery of grammatical and structural rules, which was the focus of Chomsky’s (1965) much earlier ideas of language “competence” (p. 3), the goal of CLT approaches was to enable students to acquire and apply diverse language practices to communicate in socially and culturally authentic ways. In order to challenge Chomsky’s view of language competences, Hymes (1972) put forward the notion

of “communicative competence” (p. 281), which was not only aware of the linguistic elements of a language but also the appropriate, feasible and accepted uses of the language. However, when dealing with communicative competence in the language classroom, CLT argued (and continues to argue) that students and teachers can still be helped by following some sets of pre-existing rules and norms from native speakers (Alptekin, 2002, p. 61). Therefore, the “standardized” English from a native speaker model continues to be one of the vital tenets of CLT approaches (Alptekin, 2002). Students are expected to master native-like competence – a set of appropriate behaviours in communication.

Through the decades that CLT approaches have been widely used in L2 classrooms, one of the priorities for teaching and learning has been to understand the “life and institutions” of the target culture (Corbett, 2003, p. 31). It is believed that as well as acquiring sound system, grammar system, and vocabulary system of a language, one must also learn the cultural systems of that language, in order to “speak appropriately, fluently and correctly” (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983, p. 30). Seelye’s (1993) list of three cultural learning and teaching techniques, originally published in the mid 1980s, gained wide popularity in the field of CLT. They are:

1. Cultural assimilators: Students are exposed to as many ‘episodes’ of target cultural behaviours as possible. These episodes invariably raise some cross-cultural knowledges which need to be examined and reflected upon.
2. Cultural Capsules: Students are encouraged to make presentation during class time about cultural differences between their native language and the target language, along with some illustrative pictures or realia to emphasise the authentic aspects of the cultures.
3. Cultural Clusters: It is a group of two or more cultural capsules on related themes/topics and one 30 minutes classroom simulation/skit that integrate information contained in the capsules. The teacher acts as narrator to guide students. (pp. 167-168)

Although CLT approaches were originally thought to be revolutionary, in shifting the educational focus from the teaching of just ‘linguistics aspects’ of the language to the teaching of ‘authentic functions’ of the language with an acute awareness of the cultural context of these functions, their limitations have been elaborated by numerous researchers and educators. For example, McMeniman and Evans (1997) believe that these approaches do not teach culture as an inherent part of language, and overt exposure of cultural codes to students could not help

them fully understand the target culture. CLT approaches are also criticized as ignoring the fact that the culture assimilation through exposure and immersion cannot guarantee the cultural awareness and understanding of the learning (Baxter, 1983). What is more, as explained in Chapter 2 of this thesis, many educators claim that the native speaker model is an unrealistically narrow understanding of a language, and for many learners it presents as an unrealistic goal for them to achieve. As Cook (1999) states, “the prominence of the native speaker in language teaching has obscured the distinctive nature of successful L2 user and created an unattainable goal” (p. 185). Also, the standardized English promoted by this type of approaches disempowers those L2 learners and downgrades other varieties of Englishes (Singh & Singh, 1999).

### ***Process-oriented approaches***

As far as the teaching of L2 writing is concerned, process-influenced approaches to some extent echo the tenets of CLT approaches in that they also teach writing as a meaningful communicative activity for real-life purposes and audience. Process-oriented approaches place the importance on the ‘process’ of learning to write, which involves a broad array of activities concerned with searching, organizing, and forming ideas (Zamel, 1987). Generating sentences and paragraphs on a piece of paper or on a computer screen can be seen as a minor part of writing on the grounds that writing is a continuing process which is intimately bound up with language and thought (Devis & McKay, 1996). Process-oriented approaches require writers to shift their focus from the final product of writing to a nonlinear and complex process of producing the document (Tehran, 2009). Writing is regarded as a process of discovering, refining, and articulating one’s thinking, as much as, or even more than, creating a product.

Thirty years ago, Flower and Hayes (1981) proposed a basic model of composition instruction which involved three significant elements: the long-term memory, the task environment and the writing process. Writing pedagogy that has utilized this model over the decades sees writers as drawing on their long-term memory to ‘extract’ information related to the topic, the audience and the writing plan. At the same time, this model takes into account the writing ‘situation’ which is associated with a particular problem, a particular assignment and eventually the growing text. The act of writing is understood a number of activities such as planning, drafting, checking, revising, and after a draft text is produced it still emphasizes the importance of editing and revising this text. The composition process highlights that real learning includes processes of “pre-writing”, “mid-writing”, and “post-writing” (Moffett, 1981, p. 17). Process

writing pedagogy, he argued, appreciates that writing is best learned through participation in a community of writers, where all are writing for their own particular and genuine purposes (Whitney et al., 2008).

Flower and Hayes's (1981) model was considered by some to be quite progressive for its time. However, other scholars from the 1980s (e.g., Bereiter & Scadamalia, 1987) were concerned that the newly recommended *process* of writing tended to be prescriptive, and that it paid little heed to the differences between unskilled and skilled writers. Bereiter and Scadamalia (1987) proposed another model of process writing that identified differences between *knowledge-telling* and *knowledge-transforming* and built this into their explanation of the complexities of the writing process. According to Bereiter and Scadamalia (1987), novice writers are more likely to be engaged in 'knowledge-telling' because they are inclined to retrieve information about a topic from memory and then display what they have learned in their writing. By contrast, mature writers adopt more of a 'knowledge-transforming' paradigm which heavily depends on constant problem-solving analysis and goal-setting processes. Although the broad distinction between novice and skilled writers has been critiqued as a little problematic (see Myles, 2002), this notion of 'knowledge transforming' is particularly apposite for the Chinese postgraduate writers in my study who are drawing on and transforming knowledge of discipline, of writing styles and genres, and the understanding of writing in Chinese that is never far from the surface of their thinking about academic writing in English.

Although both CLT and process-oriented approaches have become widespread, they have attracted criticism because of their failure to engage with different social contexts and cultural identity factors in language learning and writing (Cook, 1999; Hyland, 2003). More culturally sensitive teaching and learning approaches – sometimes called Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT) (e.g., Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) – tend to become more and more popular.

### **3.1.3 Intercultural Language Teaching (ILT) approaches and New Literacy Studies (NLS) approaches**

#### ***ILT approaches***

Language learning is not, in its ideal form, a process of assimilation, but rather a process of exploration. (Crozet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999, p. 181)

ILT advocates argue that when teachers teach a L2 or foreign or additional language in a classroom, they are seeking to connect their students to a world that is in various ways different from their own. For language learners who are living in a culturally complex and dynamic world, L2 teaching and learning, or just learning a language, becomes a remarkably complex issue. Where CLT approaches are critiqued for their inadequate appreciation of the interconnection between language and culture in L2 learning (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999), a number of researchers and educators have attempted to more faithfully reflect the culturally diverse worlds of students, by expanding the notion of ‘communicative competence’ to include ‘intercultural competence’ (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1997). The broad concept of ILT understands ‘communication’ as more than information exchange and message sending. It sees the role of language as fundamental to “the construction of identities and the understanding and mediation of cultural difference” (Aguilar, 2007 p. 65). Twenty years ago, Byram (1995) proposed a conceptual framework comprising five so-called “*saviors*” in the form of skills and knowledge needed to develop intercultural competence of language learners:

Table 3.2 Five saviors of intercultural competence (adapted from Bryam, 1995)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Knowledge of self and other; of the relationship between the individual and the society; of the process of social and individual interactions;</li> <li>2. Skills of interpreting and relating information;</li> <li>3. Skills of showing curiosity and openness; of evaluating critically cultural behaviours;</li> <li>4. Skills of discovering and acquiring cultural knowledge; of operating knowledge, attitudes and skills under real-life communication;</li> <li>5. Skills of relativising oneself and valuing the attitude and beliefs of others.</li> </ol>
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These five “*saviors*” should not be treated as mutually exclusive, but rather as components integrated and intertwined with the aspects concerned with intercultural competence (Sercu, 2005). With regard to the application and operation of ILT approaches in L2 learning contexts, Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco (1999) proposed the following framework to better understand the culturally mediated nature of all language learning practices. The framework consists of three dimensions of inquiry into culture when teaching and learning a language:

1. Learning about culture: Culture is seen as embedded in language and one should not assume that it can be acquired through osmosis. Crozet and Liddicoat (1999, p. 116) created the following table to show points of articulation between language and culture which can help teachers teach culture and learners develop a deeper knowledge of culture and its relationship to language.



Table 3.3 Teaching of language and culture (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999)

Culture				language
world knowledge	spoken/written genres	pragmatic norms	norms of interactions	grammar/lexicon kinesics/prosody pronunciation
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
culture in context	culture in general structure of text	culture within shorter units of text	culture in organization of units of text	culture in linguistic structures/words/syntax/non-verbal

2. Comparing culture: Since language classrooms in multicultural societies are more likely to contain learners with diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, teachers should not only focus on the target linguaculture but also the learners' linguaculture. Learners are encouraged to make comparisons between their native linguaculture and the target linguaculture. In this sense, ILT approaches advocate bilingual/multilingual classrooms because "the use of a single language by a community is no guarantee of social harmony or mutual understanding... nor does the presence of more than one language within a community necessitate a civil strife" (Crystal, 1997, pp. 12-20). It is worth noting that ILT researchers and practitioners tend to accept the notion of multiple "global Englishes" which are "willing to accept variation in accent, tone, rhythm, pronunciation, grammar, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, and even culture" (McArthur, 1998, p. 118).
  
3. Intercultural exploration: ILT approaches encourage L2 learners to acknowledge that they are involved in two cultures in learning an additional language: their own culture and that of the target language. One way of helping learners to appreciate these cultures, is for teachers to provide them with opportunities to explore their own culture and that of the additional language they are learning. Sometimes this is called a "third place" for exploring these two cultures (Crozet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999) – in the context of my study, this has obvious links with Bhabha's (1994) notion of a "third space" for exploring two (or more) cultures. Therefore, intercultural language learning encourages learners neither to maintain their own cultural frame nor to assimilate to the target cultural frame. Rather, learners try to explore and enrich an intermediary space that helps them to understand both themselves and others (cf. Bakhtin, 1981). In the process of cultural exploration, learners encounter and negotiate differences in cultural values and norms, such as the organization

of information, the degree of directness of talk, the preferred rhetorical style, and sense of their own voice in their language learning (Carr, 1999). Therefore, language classrooms in schools and universities are likely to be alive with collisions, differences, tensions and interruptions. Although this situation may require learners to step out of their ‘comfort zone’ of the traditional way of dealing with culture and language, ILT proponents argue that learners benefit from experiencing differences and conflicts involved in additional language learning; they are called upon to encounter and make sense of the collisions, differences, tensions as a necessary part of learning another language. This focus on cultural hybridity and framing language learning as an intercultural experience is congruent with a key concept in my study: that is, Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of heteroglossia, in which diverse linguistic utterances, cultures and voices are in a constant dynamic dialogue, and this dialogue is mediated by the particular cultural context in which it takes place (see pp. 38-40 of Chapter 2).

Since language both reflects and contributes to identity formation, L2 learners’ home language knowledge (including knowledge of their home culture) is appreciated by ILT advocates as a significant aspect of their social identity (Byram, 1995). Thus, ILT approaches give prominence to valuing learners’ home culture and this is an important part of empowering them as learners in their L2 learning.

In summary, because ILT views culture as an adjunct of language, which is dynamic and ever-changing, it positions learners as not only “learners of language” but also “learners of culture” (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999, p. 122). This fundamentally redefines the role of teacher. Teachers are encouraged to get to know and value students’ individual differences and to “share the power” they have as teachers with their students (Aguilar, 2007, p. 69). One way to do this is to give students who are learning another language more space to create and explore an intermediate place or space between their own culture and that of the target language community.

### ***NLS approaches***

When talking about the learning and teaching of *writing* specifically, the approaches advocated by scholars who self-identify as New Literacy Study scholars can be seen as broadly compatible with the major tenets of ILT discussed above. NLS explores an understanding of language in the context of multiple notions of literacies, and it devotes considerable time to

describing and theorizing these literacies as social practice, occurring in a variety of social, cultural, and economic contexts (Gee, 1996; Kalantzis & Cope, 2000). In this regard, learning to write requires the teacher to take into account a range of literacy practices appropriate to their students' varied writing contexts (Lea & Street, 1998).

Locke (2005), amongst others (e.g., Badger & White, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998), has mapped competing and complementary conceptions of writing in recent curriculum history, and has categorized them into four groups: skills acquisition (promoting learners' textual and sub-textual competence); personal growth (developing personal understandings and sensitivities to the world); cultural heritage (focusing on the value and emulation of the traditional literacy products; and critical literacy (improving learners' abilities to do critical text analysis and social translation). Since, Locke (2005) argues, learning to write is a complicated, multifaceted and culturally mediated process, he suggests that learners cannot afford to rely on just one of these conceptions of writing when grappling with problems arising in their writing and learning of language.

Before concluding this brief survey of NLS approaches to L2 writing learning, I wish to mention two other frameworks related to L2 writing learning that have influenced the analytical framework which I go on to articulate in Chapter 4.

### **Freebody and Luke's 'Four resources' / 'Four roles' model**

The first is the 'Four resources' model, sometimes called 'Four roles' proposed by Freebody and Luke (1990). This model provides a means for understanding and responding to the complexities, challenges and diversities of literacy practices in various cultural, economic and social environments. In the context of a study about postgraduate students' developing their academic writing and knowledge in English, it suggests that a successful writer variously enacts all of the following roles when engaging in all manners of literacy practices.

Table 3.4 Four resources / roles model (Freebody & Luke, 1990)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Code breaker – Language users apply the basic linguistic structures of written or spoken texts, such as the alphabet, spelling, and grammar to make sense of a text.</li> <li>2. Text participant – Language users actively compose and make sense of texts by drawing on their prior and background knowledge and experience of similar texts and/or topics and/or cultural discourses.</li> <li>3. Text user – Language users rely on their knowledge of various competences to monitor the different purposes of texts for different cultural and social functions.</li> <li>4. Text analyst – Language users seek to examine texts in terms of existing social, cultural and political knowledge about texts and culture, and establish a critical stance about their reading or writing.</li> </ol>
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The four roles model has useful applications to this study, such as in acknowledging that Chinese postgraduate students who are writing their theses in English are often linking their knowledge of writing in academic studies to their knowledge of writing outside formal study. Thus, they are using a variety of roles and resources in their English academic writing that move beyond the coding and decoding of words or symbols to understand and analyze texts functionally and critically. Invariably, Freebody and Luke's model draws attention to the multiple social and cultural aspects of students' writing practices which involve constantly shifting focus on linguistic dimensions, meaning-making, critical analysis as well as communicative competence in literacy practices (see also Van Kraaynoord & Moni, 1999; Nicholas & Bayetto, 2004).

### **Green's (1999, 2009) 3D model of literacy**

Green's 3D model, like Freebody and Luke's four roles model, argues that literacy is a situated social practice, bringing together language, meaning and cultural context in a range of textual and language practices (Green, 1999; Green & Beavis, 2012). Based on a social-cultural perspective of literacy, Green (1988) discusses his 3D model in relation to subject-specific literacy learning, which he says is a "holistic, integrated view of literacy, as composing three interlocking dimensions or aspects" (Green, 2002, p. 27). The three dimensions of literacy are useful to consider in my study, since it helps to explain the various interdependent aspects of literacy practices that the Chinese postgraduate students are consciously or unconsciously enacting as they engage in academic writing of one sort or another in Australia.

Table 3.5 A summary of the three dimensions of Green's 3D model (derived from Green, 1988)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The operational dimension: Learners' competency with regard to deploying various technical elements of a language system. This might involve understanding the functions of the alphabet, grammatical knowledge, genre conventions, and various technologically mediated ways of producing or 'consuming' text.</li> <li>2. The cultural dimension: Learners' capability to make sense of various meaning making approaches within particular cultural contexts. This can involve awareness of the ways in which specific contexts, institutions or other cultural considerations impact on the ways readers or writers make sense of/with texts.</li> <li>3. The critical dimension: Learners' ability to make conscious decisions that allow them to improve, transform and construct knowledge in a range of literacy practices and contexts. This dimension appreciates the ways in which learners can take an active role in knowledge reproduction and transformation, and this might involve challenging and critiquing an existing knowledge system or ideology.</li> </ol>
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Both the four roles model and the 3D model recognize that literacy practice is concerned with an integrated expression of all the roles and dimensions in question (Durrant & Green, 2000). Moreover, both models emphasize that each aspect of literacy is essential, and no single aspect has any priority over others. In the context of a study investigating Chinese L2 writers, these two 'models' can help identify when and to what extent these writers are mindful of and perhaps utilizing various resources, roles and dimensions as writers situated within a range of cultures and discourse communities. Writing before Freebody and Luke's 'Four roles' model and Green's '3D framework' were published, Guerra prefigures many of the ideas advocated in these other scholars' works. He says that L2 writers should seek to develop "the ability to consciously and effectively move back and forth among as well as in and out of the discourse communities they belong to or will belong to" (1997, p. 258). This study takes the view that all of these perspectives of writing – e.g., that writing involves a range of linguistically complex and culturally situated practices – can be helpful in developing an understanding of how Chinese postgraduate students' educational backgrounds and current cultural/institutional contexts influence their English academic writing. Certainly, both are helpful in resisting the temptation to see writing as a rigid sequence of steps for generating words on the page or the screen.

### 3.1.4 Conclusion

The wide variety of teaching methods and approaches I have reviewed in the first part of Chapter 3 consider a range of debates about and perspectives on language teaching and learning, and more specifically writing as an L2 writer in English. While seeking to faithfully represent

these different historical discussions about these approaches, I have not stepped back from taking a more overtly critical perspective on some of them, especially when some approaches are more likely to confuse than providing comfort in my efforts to describe and analyze the experiences of my Chinese participants in developing their English academic writing practices while completing postgraduate degrees in Australia. It is evident that the history of L2 teaching and learning practices features robust debate and considerable changes – and yet in some areas and institutions such change is slow to occur. Also, the changes are often more about a complete abandonment of one idea in favour of another. For instance, while I have observed that CLT has presented a compelling critique of narrowly grammar-oriented approaches, I have not meant to imply that the adoption of CLT approaches which puts a premium on the “functions” of language means that teachers and students totally ignore the “forms” and structures of language.

Neither has my purpose been to compare each perspective or approach to find out the best. In my review, I have shown how so many of the approaches can be seen to overlap with another. The importance of this critical review of approaches to L2 learning and learning to write in a second or additional language, is to inform the conceptual framework for understanding the complexities of learning L2 in general and learning to write in L2 in particular that I will be presenting in Chapter 4. My research participants have to face a number of challenges and problems in their English academic writing. They have to grapple with multiple (often contradictory) voices, linguistic traditions, cultures and identities as they write their theses in Australia. A nuanced knowledge of these challenges, and the backgrounds to the competing conceptual and practical traditions of language teaching and learning, is crucial for appreciating, analysing and making sense of their experiences.

I now turn briefly to consider the wide range of literature that focuses specifically on L2 writing practices, literature that is (as might be expected from reading 3.1 of this chapter) characterised by widely diverse contributions, contradictions and contestation.

### **3.2 Research into L2 writing practices**

Following the exploration of the teaching and learning of L2 and writing from the perspective of practical applications and approaches, this section of the chapter critically reviews research into L2 students’ writing. Once again, I do not attempt to present a comprehensive review of the literature, but I do draw attention to some significant studies in this field as well as my own

English academic writing experiences as a Chinese postgraduate student, having studied in Australia and in China. At the risk of over-simplifying a literature that is indeed highly complex, I have structured 3.2 to draw out what I see as the significant contrasts in the literature between researchers who are more concerned with examining L2 writers' products and those researchers who are more concerned with inquiring into writing processes and practices, although as I will show this is by no means a neat binary. I begin with the body of work that is more concerned with writing products.

### **3.2.1 A focus on L2 writing products**

Historically, there has been no shortage of studies preoccupied with the problems, difficulties and flaws in L2 writers' products. For example, Mahmoud (1982) reported that L2 writing is prone to be less logical, to lack variety and explicit formal closure. Hinkel (1997) suggests that ESL writers' style can be characterized as full of digression and vagueness. Even though it is acknowledged that such findings may play a positive role for L2 students to improve their writing, this study is more interested in reviewing research directed at investigating L2 writing from a productive standpoint rather than merely concentrating on deficit characterizations of their writing.

And yet there has been a great deal of literature published that is concerned about this narrow and, in their view ill-conceived, focus on L2 written products. Thus, many scholars in the past three decades have rigorously critiqued those studies that seem pre-occupied with the evaluating the quality of L2 writing products, and drawing attention to the many technical deficits of these products. Some show that this focus on deficits often arises from other researchers' de-contextualized conceptualizations of language and writing, such as I have reviewed in 3.1.1 above (e.g., Pennycook, 1995). Other scholars argue that cultural generalizations and assumptions on the part of researchers and/or educators about L2 students/writers inform all manner of judgements about the flaws and deficits in this writing (e.g., Kramsch, 2003). In critiquing the research which focuses on deficit constructions of Asian students writing in English, for example, Kumaravadivelu (2003) argues that Asian students' characteristics are stereotyped in this type of literature: he suggests Asian students are often assumed to (a) be obedient to authority, (b) lack critical thinking skills, and (c) be unwilling or unable to interact actively in classroom activities (p. 710).

In the following, I review and discuss some of rhetorical features of L2 written works that a

focus on products has brought to the surface.

### ***Rhetorical features and structure***

The use of rhetorical strategies in the language style seems to become many L2 writers' particular concern partly because of their L2 language proficiency and partly because of the different language styles in different cultures. Le Ha (1999), herself bi-lingual in Vietnamese and English, observes that Vietnamese students often prefer musical and sophisticated words to create a multi-layered and flexible writing style when writing in their home language. She draws attention to the influence of lullabies, folk songs and Vietnamese tonal language on Vietnamese students who are writing in English. In my own experiences, the traditional Tang-poems and Songci-poems have exerted an enormous influence on Chinese students' English writing, and this "poetic" written style has been popular among Chinese students' English writing. Other scholars have noted that Chinese students seem to have a preference for the verbal or grammatical parallelism in their English writing, which helps to give a sense of symmetry and harmonious balance in that writing (Kirkpatrick, 1997).

There have been some interesting studies of different 'organizational patterns' between texts generated in different cultures. Kaplan (1966), for instance, has schematized what he calls "contrastive rhetoric" – and which others refer to as 'rhetorical organization' – of academic texts written in different languages. Figure 3.1 shows his diagrammatic representation of different rhetorical structures: "linear" (which is his characterization of English writing); "indirect" (his characterization of "oriental" writing styles); "digressive" (for Romantic languages such as French); and "digressive, irrelevant" (for Russian writing):

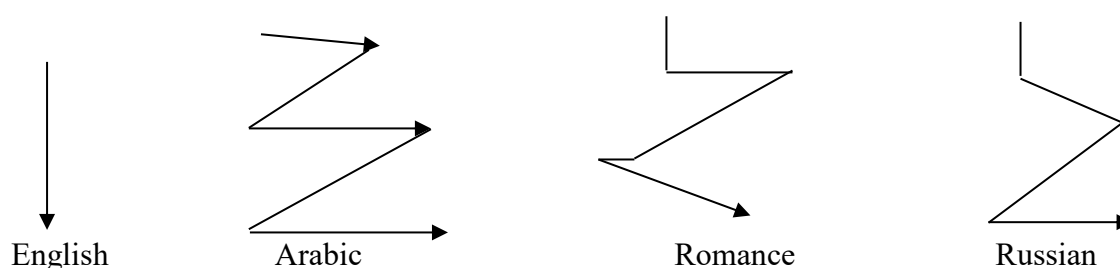


Figure 3.1 Rhetorical organization of writing in different languages (Kaplan, 1966)

Kaplan claims that patterns of logic or rhetoric in texts are culturally based. There was a period of time where this idea had some support in the literature (e.g., Trimble, 1985), and in the 1970s



and 1980s practitioners across the world used Kaplan's 'findings' to justify their adoption of these ideas in their teaching philosophy for ESL students. However, Kaplan's descriptions about the relationship between culture and writing tend to treat culture as monolithic and suggest that all people writing within one country (or geographical entity) are bound by some directive that determines their subscription to this monolithic pattern of writing (Liddicoat, 1997). It denies the dynamic and multiple features of any national culture and seems to rely on cultural stereotypes rather than a close study of academic texts. When judged according to these western writing criteria and rhetorical value systems, the heuristic for categorizing national writing cultures seems fraught with problems. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of Kaplan's analysis, and of others who employ his heuristic, is the implication that what Kaplan calls 'linear rhetoric' is superior and that all other rhetorics are deficient in one way or another. Burns (1991, as cited in Tan, 2000), for example, claims that Chinese rhetorical cultures encourage writers to use unnecessary repetition and disconnected logic in their writing, and the barely disguised implication is that Chinese rhetoric is inferior to English linear logic. Other studies in this area have still tended to work with cultural stereotypes, although they might be considered a little less culturally offensive study. For instance, Mauranen (1993) contrasted what she saw as the rhetorical preferences of Anglo-American and Finnish writers and found that the academic writing of Anglo-Americans was more reader-oriented, personal and explicit, while these Finnish writers preferred more "implicit" rhetorical strategies and a more "impersonal" style. In another study, respected Australian linguist Michael Clyne (1981, 1987) examined what he classified as the differences between English and German discourse patterns. He claimed that German educated scientists favored more digressive and less symmetrical rhetorical styles than their English counterparts, and he argues that linearity and digressiveness are consistent with their respective cultural values systems.

Perhaps building on Kaplan's earlier research, a range of international research, including by Chinese scholars, continues to claim that most eastern academic writing (especially Chinese) features circular logic, while English-speaking writers largely rely on linear structures (Jin, 2001). Kaplan (1972) had attributed Chinese students' indirect pattern of organization to the influence of the traditional form of the Chinese 'Eight-Legged Essay'. This form of writing emerged from a civil service examination that operated in China a thousand years ago. Kaplan asserted that adherence to this eight-legged essay form of writing caused Chinese academic writers to lose coherence and clarity, wandering around a topic before getting to the main point, when they came to write in English. Another study from the 1980s (Hinds, 1987), argued that

much eastern writing assumes that readers would be readily able to grasp the intended meanings of a Chinese writer, if the writer wrote in sufficiently evocative and expressive ways. The inference was that Chinese writers writing in English were more inwardly focused on their own interests and concerns, and that the resultant texts paid scant attention to the readers' needs. Once again, the implication was that this was yet another deficit in Chinese writers trying to write in English.

In yet another strand of research into L2 writing practices, some scholars have argued that writing by eastern writers, who had grown up in communities valuing Confucian, Taoist, or Buddhist philosophies, tended to value politeness when writing in English, and would adopt more indirect forms of address rather than running the 'risk' of criticizing others (e.g., Hinkel, 1997). For example, Snively (1994, as cited in Yang, 2001) points out that instead of thinking critically in writing, Chinese students often consider it challenging and avoid criticizing others' works or established knowledge altogether.

Challenging so much of the literature I have referred to in the previous pages is the work of higher education literacy scholars such as Carroll and Ryan (2005) and others (e.g. Straker, 2016), who argue that there is as much diversity and difference within writing traditions and cultures in Chinese history as the supposed differences claimed by other researchers between Chinese and western writers. In my study, while I am skeptical of some of the generalisations and cultural stereotypes, I do examine some of these claims when considering the ways in which the Chinese postgraduate students speak about their English academic writing, and the ways they use different rhetorical strategies in their particular scholarly disciplines.

### ***Writer's identity***

Some studies are focused not just on the linguistic and rhetorical features of L2 written products, but also on the writers who have produced them. Such studies have explored writers' own individuality, identity and values in the texts they produce (Liddicoat, 1997). Viète and Le Ha (2007) have noted that the processes and practices of writing that individual writers enact might have much to do with "their own ever-evolving writer identities" (p. 55). In recent years, the intersection of academic writing and identity construction have attracted significant attention in the ESL learning and teaching literature. For example, Abasi, Akbari and Graves (2006) interviewed five ESL higher education students about their awareness of their identities in relation to the academic discourse communities of which they were a part. By analyzing drafts

of the students' academic writing, their final assignments along with assessors' written comments on those assignments, some course-related artifacts, and text-based interviews data, they report that these ESL students exhibit widely differing levels of awareness of their identity. They further found that a lack of awareness of their identity had a strong correlation with problems they might have experienced in relation to plagiarism, suggesting that students' lack of identity awareness often led them to regard academic writing as a process of reproducing truth rather than constructing knowledge through engaging with arguments. Viete and Le Ha (2007) are also interested in the process of self-negotiation in the writing of novice researchers who speak other languages and come from other academic cultures. Through retrospective and introspective reflection, they examine what Le Ha characterizes as her 'risky' academic writing style, such as when she uses first person pronouns in academic papers, as well as personalized arguments and "flowery" language. The two academics report that Le Ha has negotiated a cultural and linguistic "third space" (p. 49) in her writing, and that she feels comfortable in this space. Invariably, this involves combinations of "local conventions" and personal aspects of Le Ha's writing (e.g., passionate articulation of her perspective, personal arguments, and explicit drawing on her prior knowledge). Through these types of rhetorical strategies, Le Ha consciously shapes her identity in terms of authorial, discursive, and autobiographical perspectives. Viete and Le Ha call on academic communities to reconsider expectations of rigid and predictable discursive practices, and to allow more diversity in L2 academic writing in respect to discursive organization, the use of metaphor, explicit references to self, and seeing self-experience as a source of authority.

The issue of "plagiarism" in L2 higher education academic writing continues to attract interest of a wide range of researchers across the world, many of whom judge instances of plagiarism as evidence of international students' failure to understand the notion of their authorial identity in their writing (e.g., Abasi, Akbari, Graves, 2006). Thirty years ago, Matalene's (1985) asserted that her Chinese students followed reading sources too closely and they regarded that as a valid writing strategy. Twenty years ago, a similar phenomenon was reported by Pennycook (1996), with Chinese higher education students widely characterized as drawing from academic sources but failing to appreciate the need to provide appropriate attribution of the original writer. A number of researchers (e.g., Barker, 1997) attribute L2 writers' plagiarism to cultural and educational differences rather than their sloppiness or lack of academic skills or purposeful intention to transgress academic conventions. Matalene (1985) finds evidence of higher education students in some countries being encouraged to draw directly from other

writers because such a practice helps undergraduate students learn by “imitating” others’ writing. Pecorari (2003) uses the term of “patchwriting” coined by Howard (1995) to explain this practice. She believes that the misuse of sources is an early, “neutral” stage in a novice academic’s development, from which the novice writer’s own voice will eventually emerge: “today’s patching writing”, she says, “is tomorrow’s competent academic writer” (2003, p. 338). Therefore, she argues that educators and administrators need to hold a positive view of patchwriting and shift the focus on the prevention of plagiarism from post “facto punishment” to “proactive teaching” (p. 317). In the narrative cases I present in Part Four, I am particularly interested in showing how my research participants interpret and ‘borrow’ from various sources in their academic writing, and the extent to what they are aware of their own identity and voice when drawing on these sources.

However, some researchers express skepticism about the significance of ‘voice’ in academic writing; they believe that overstating the importance of voice leads to ignorance with respect to content and ideas. For example, Stapleton (2002) argues that the quality of academic writing has no relationship with the writer’s awareness of identity. The ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel & Hughey, 1981), which has been called “one of the best known and widely used analytic scales” (Weigle, 2002, p. 15, cited in Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003, p. 248), claims to be able to measure the quality of ESL writing in terms of five categories: content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. Identity or awareness of identity is a notable absence from this list.

Chinese students who pursue postgraduate study in Australian universities often experience a sort of rebirth as they face a range of challenges relating to academic, cultural and social aspects of their study (Wang & Shan, 2006; 2007). They need to learn English as a second language while they simultaneously learn to cope with demanding academic content and meeting assessment standards mainly designed for native speakers. Meanwhile, they walk the arduous path of establishing and cultivating their social identity and self-esteem (Garza, Reys & Trueba, 2004). Over the last decade, research on Chinese students’ English learning has flourished (e.g., Mu & Carrington, 2007; Xu, 2012). And yet when researchers and scholars investigate Chinese students’ English learning outcomes in general and writing in particular, a range of negative results appear, such as lack of authentic self – identity, ubiquitous rote learning, and preferential use of ‘we’ over ‘I’.

When looking at the totality of the literature that reports on Chinese higher education students' experiences of learning English as they develop their academic skills and knowledge, it soon becomes apparent that the challenges go well beyond linguistic concerns and invariably involve their efforts to negotiate their cultural identity and space (Uysal, 2008). Indeed, issues of identity negotiation are some of the most complex work they are doing in their international study experiences. Some researchers suggest that Chinese students' widespread reluctance to engage in the kinds of identity work that I have been alluding to above is bound up with the Chinese cultural bonds that have their roots in Confucian collectivist traditions (e.g., Hu, 2002; Zha et al., 2006; Zhao, 2012). According to the ancient philosophers in Chinese history, such as Laozi and Confucius, "the individual only exists as a component in the mechanistic construction of society, indissolubly bound to all others by prescribed duties, which are of paramount importance to their own life, and to lives of all others" (Zhao, Fei & Lin, 2013, p. 136). Influenced by such philosophy, Chinese people tend to be more conscious of collective identity. An influential study into this perceived phenomenon is Shen's (1989), where she uses critical autobiographical methods to explain what she sees as the relationship between the individual self "I" and the collective "we". Shen draws on particular incidents in her time as a Chinese international student studying in the United States, to illustrate and explain her experience of learning to write in English.

In China, 'I' is always subordinated to 'We' – be it the working class, the party, the country, or some other collective body. Both political pressure and literary tradition require the 'I' be somewhat hidden or buried in writings and speeches; presenting the 'self' too obviously would give people some impression of being disrespectful of the Communist Party in political writing and boastful in scholarly writing. The word 'I' has often identified with some another 'bad' words, 'individualism', which has become a synonym of selfishness in China. (p. 460)

Shen goes on to characterise the process of negotiating her identity as "creating and defining a new identity and balancing it with the old identity" (p. 466).

A great many researchers (e.g., Gill & Thomson 2012; Snauwaert, 2009; Zhao & Coombs, 2012) assert that a cultural paradigm shift is required of an international student when learning to write academic English. Instead of thinking of themselves as a part of collective identity and always using "we", which serves as the evidence of their reluctance to expose any personal views, these researchers argue that L2 writers need to follow the Platonic-Aristotelian model of thinking, which places the concept of 'the individual' at the heart of its ontological, cultural, educational, social, and political assumptions. But this easily stated notion of 'following the Platonic-Aristotelian model of thinking' is easier said than done. L2 higher education student

writers need to learn to reconcile and negotiate a new identity when they write in English language and culture and develop their awareness of different cultures around them. More complex accounts of this process appreciate that playing down thinking in terms of a “we” culture does not mean students are required to totally mute the sense of self that they brought to their English academic writing in an unfamiliar country. As Zhao et al. (2013) argue, uncritical transmission of so-called “westernization of students’ thinking”, such as the change of use of ‘we’ into ‘I’, does not benefit students’ higher order learning for personal growth. One of my particular interests in interviewing my Chinese student participants in this study, was to investigate the degree to which they did indeed feel a connection to a self-effacing collectivist culture, and if so how they dealt with this in the course of their honing and developing their English academic writing.

The above discussion of research in L2 academic writing has raised a number of salient issues which inform my construction of the narrative cases of the Chinese postgraduate students’ English academic writing in Part Four, and some of the cases do indeed focus on the written texts produced by these students in the form of their theses and/or academic papers they were writing at the time of my interviewing them. However, it is far from enough to only study the products of L2 written work. In order to show a more holistic picture of Chinese students’ English scholarly writing, it is necessary to investigate research which tends to be more concerned with processes and practices of L2 students’ writing.

### **3.2.2 L2 writing processes and practices**

The iconic theorist in the area of process writing for L1 writers, James Moffett argued the need for educators to see writing as a multi-faceted process, rather than becoming preoccupied with the production of written products. He urged educators to see writing in educational settings as involving phases of “pre-writing”, “mid-writing”, and “post-writing” (Moffett, 1981; see also Murray, 2003), and educators were encouraged to actively involve their students in a variety of different activities at each stage of ‘the’ process. For some time scholars devoted time to specifying stages of ‘the’ writing process – e.g., pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publication (Tompkins, 2000), as separate and independent components; others were more interested in the iterative nature of writing processes (e.g., Zamel, 1983). Interpreted from a Bakhtinian dialogic perspective, iterative writing is a process of interconnected dynamic dialogue that can help students to develop their ideas and their writing from one ‘stage’ to the next, and even within each stage.

Recent decades have witnessed much research (e.g., Li & Vandermensbrugghe, 2011; Zhu, 2006) on L2 writing processes that individual writers enact, especially in academic or higher education contexts. Some characteristics of L2 academic writing have been proposed in these studies. For researchers like Zamel (1983), the first remarkable feature of L2 composing processes is its ‘iterative’ and ‘circular’ nature. Since different cultural, institutional, spatial and technological dimensions may mediate these iterative processes, writers are likely to move backward and forward between the various proposed writing process ‘stages’ (Coffin et al., 2003). Kpolugbo (2006) remarks that L2 student-writers should be encouraged to allow for some flexibility in their writing practices. A flexible recursive approach to writing enables them to go through the pre-writing stage of choosing a topic, brainstorming ideas, outlining, and discussing with others; and then move into the while-writing stages of re-organizing and formulating ideas, generating more ideas, re-writing for better expressions, and re-reading draft copies, and finally to go through the post-writing stage of revision, re-editing. In Zamel’s (1983) study, writers are involved in an ever-renewing cycle of composing – consistently discovering, reading, drafting and revising; and they keep flexible attitudes towards their writing practices. In that study, writers’ composing/writing experiences are rarely linear and predictable; rather they are more often “non-linear, exploratory ... [a] generative process where writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning” (p. 165). That reminds me of my own English academic writing practices which I tend to describe as ‘messy’ and ‘jumping’. When I was engaged in my MEd thesis nine years ago, I sometimes felt anxious, if not actually upset, with my progress, since I was always looking for a neat and organized prescription or process that I could faithfully follow. But after months of conversations with my supervisor, I began to accept the “messiness” of the iterative nature of academic writing, and I have now come to understand all academic writing, consistent with Bakhtinian theory, to be about struggling, grappling, and even wrestling with words and meaning, until I get to a point where I feel some clarity is achieved, where I have followed some coherent logic and where there is a meaningful sense of structure sustaining the flow of the written piece I am working on.

Another significant feature of the literature about L2 writers’ processes and practices is the ways in which different writers develop different priorities during the composing processes. For example, Zamel (1983) reports how participants in his study adapted and adopted their own individual strategies for manipulating different dimensions in the writing process. They took into account how to explore meaning first, then how to organize it, and finally how it

could be presented in a logical and clear way. Rather than following a rigid sequence of these writing events, writers make constant evaluation to decide on the different allocation of their attention and time in different writing activities. In my own writing practices, my priority in the early stages of writing a first draft of a chapter for this thesis was in presenting ideas, playing with those ideas and the language I was using to articulate these ideas, and seeking some semblance of flow between one idea to the next. At that stage, I was less concerned with managing the overall structure or coherence of the whole chapter product.

L2 writing, like all writing, is a complex developmental process. Since different individuals' writing processes may vary to a large extent, my study aims at investigating both the commonalities and the uniqueness of the Chinese postgraduate students' composing processes and their individual strategies utilized. In the next section, I offer a brief review of some process-based research which respectively focuses on the social, cognitive and metacognitive aspects of L2 writing processes and practices.

### ***Social dimensions of L2 writing***

Riazi (1997) stresses the value of the social dimensions of writing, when he reports how students in his study communicated with other students in their academic community. This communication might be to help understand the guidelines given by lecturers/teachers, and it might be to clarify different aspects of the topic under investigation before they began researching for the writing and, indeed, at any 'stage' of the writing of the required task. Moreover, Riazi emphasizes the helpful role that a writer's interaction with others plays during and after the performance of tasks. Caffarella and Barnett (2000) find that receiving feedback and critique from professors/teachers, as well as from peers or even organized support groups, assists writers in creating potential solutions to challenges or problems they face in their writing. Villami and De Guerrero (2000) report on the value of social interactions in L2 writing not only in terms of shaping the revision process but also in helping students stay committed or focused on task accomplishment. They report that talk can help activate L2 writers' ZPDs and allow them to work better to achieve their potential in whatever writing they are undertaking.

Gill (2005), speaking primarily about L1 writing in schools, emphasizes the importance of creating spaces where "meaningful social interaction broadens people's sense of self beyond the "me" and "I" into "we" and "us" (p. 159). She reflects on the way that students in her classroom are able to use online discussion with their peers in preparing for and revising drafts



of writing. She finds that online discussion between teacher and students can extend the community conversation way beyond the limited time a class meets together in a classroom, and it can both hone and develop students' analytical thinking. In this process of rich and extended conversation with a community, students' sense of self can be broadened and their collective identity blossoms. Similar ideas have been pursued in higher education settings. For instance, Ladyshevsky and Gotjamanos (1997) and Parr, Wilson, Godinho and Lonagretti (2004) conducted projects concerned with the development of communication skills in higher education through a focus on peer assessment, and they helpfully illustrated the diverse ways in which students writing and reflection in small, bounded academic communities (such as workshops or tutorial groups) can benefit from a focused conversation managed and guided by a university lecturer or tutor.

That may be well and good in L1 writing communities. However, some studies (e.g., Shaw, 1991; Zhu, 2006) suggest that L2 writers are not strong in this regard. According to the data from Zhu's (2006) case study, which examined interaction and feedback in mixed peer response groups composed of both ESL students and English native speaker counterparts, ESL students' participation in oral feedback is limited, compared with that of native speakers. Their findings indicate the complexities of social interaction practices in L2 writing and prompt me to explore this issue more deeply in my own study.

In higher education, postgraduate students typically have access to a wide range of resources and support when writing their academic texts. A wide range of studies show that some L2 writers do appreciate the opportunities to obtain verbal and written communication on their work in progress from their L2 writing peers, such as in peer writing groups. Some, though, are suspicious of the advice their peers may offer, and they prefer writing support specialists for their conversations and support. Li and Vandermensbrugghe (2011) evaluated an ongoing writing group which was set up to support thesis writing processes of international research students in an Australian university. They identified the benefits of improving confidence, increasing awareness of language use, and developing reader awareness in the participating L2 writing students. At the same time, they pointed out issues emerging from the writing group. For instance, it is possible that such groups develop into a forum for fixing specific writing problems in a particular piece, whereas they recommend that such writing groups ought to be concentrating on learning to write in English and longer term development as writers, rather than just fixing short term problems (Li & Vandermensbrugghe, 2011).

A number of studies have noted that receiving and working with constructive feedback from peers and supervisors is essential in the writing an L2 thesis (e.g., Wisker, 2008). Li and Vandermensbrugghe (2011) found that their participants initially felt embarrassed when their writing was critiqued by peers. They ascribe this embarrassment to L2 writers' cultural backgrounds which, they felt, rendered them uncomfortable in dealing with open criticism (see also Wang & Li, 2008).

There are particular studies that closely examine the way L2 writers in English speaking universities feel about and work with academic writing specialists. The studies consistently report benefits such as: learning about written conventions, and using this learning to reduce the incidence of mechanical errors; building up a repertoire of frequently used academic discourse, such as linking ideas; and developing a stronger familiarity with academic genres and styles of writing within these genres. Some of this literature speaks about the tricky negotiation sometimes needed when guidance is being offered by independent language specialist, and the recommendations that allocated research supervisors might make in developing a chapter of a thesis, for example (see O'Mahony, Verezub, Dalreymple & Bertone, 2013; Diezmann, 2005). Studies in this area do report, however, that some L2 researcher-writers in English speaking universities do tend to prefer to work quietly with themselves, although they are, in a sense, in dialogue with other disembodied academic voices in the form of dictionaries, journals, and a range of online resources.

### ***Cognitive dimensions of L2 writing***

Riazi (1997) has identified a set of categories – such as inferencing, use of mother tongue knowledge, revising and editing – which he argues are powerful instances of the cognitive activities associated with writing. In this section, I review and discuss the cognitive aspects of L2 writing in terms of engagement with L1, reading and intertextuality, and revising, all of which emerged as relevant to participants in my research to varying degrees.

### **Engagement with L1**

In Villami and De Guerrero's (2000) research into scaffolded peer revision of L2 writing, they identify five “mediating strategies” of student collaboration which all include a central role of L1 in the communication strategies. They nominate L1 as “an essential tool” for “making meaning of text, retrieving language from memory, exploring and expanding content, guiding their action through the task, and maintaining dialogue” (p. 60). Similarly, Antón and

Dicamilla's (1999) study of the function of L1 in L2 literacy practices argues that L1 offers a powerful tool of mediation at both interpersonal level and intrapsychological level. From the interpersonal perspective, the use of L1 allows learners to have easy access to scaffolded help when working with a more knowledgeable other (see Vygotsky's ZPD) and to construct a shared understanding of the task. From the intrapsychological perspective, in the form of inner speech or private speech, L1 can play an important role in individuals' problems resolving and regulation of thinking activities. The similar results are evident in Wang and Wen's research (2002). By analyzing sixteen Chinese ESL learners' think-aloud tasks, narration and argumentation, they report that these Chinese students relied on translations into their mother tongue to understand most writing prompts or assignments, and they used it to retrieve ideas from their memory and to monitor their writing practices. Through all of these strategies, the use of L1 in L2 writing can be seen to reduce an individual's overall cognitive load.

While many researchers hold a positive attitude toward the use of L1 in L2 writing practices, some contradictions are also identified. For example, Friedlander (1990) claims that L2 writers could "plan for their writing more effectively, write better texts containing more content, and create texts when they are able to plan in the language related to the acquisition of knowledge of the topic area" (p. 13) if they did not rely so heavily on L1 in their L2 writing.

### **Reading and intertextuality**

The close relationship between reading and writing, especially in academic settings, is often commented upon and examined by researchers (e.g., NLS scholars, such as Lea and Street, 1998; see also Brittenham & Hoeller, 2004; Riazi, 1997). A number of studies focus on the reading of L2 students in their idea-exploring activities. For example, Cooper and Patton (2007) propose three strategies for exploring ideas, namely, brainstorming, freewriting, and reading sources of information. Mu and Carrington (2007) find that Chinese students often read a wide variety of materials related to their specific fields to inform and direct their thoughts and to generate ideas in the early phases of their English academic writing. Hinkel (2004) suggests that ESL students place great emphasis on reading because they rely on the reading sources to retrieve information and get to know rhetorical conventions. In this regard, Spivey (1997) identifies three kinds of operations: selection, organization and connection of reading materials. Spivey argues that L2 writers ought to follow these steps to make the best use of available L2 reading resources for their writing.

Due to the significance of reading in writing processes which has been investigated in the above-mentioned studies, many researchers have been hard at work trying to understand the most appropriate approach to interpreting and using these reading resources in writing processes. Reid and Mulligan's (1997) research on literacy practices in Australian universities, particularly "reading", uses framing theory to understand the ways in which L2 writing students make use of L2 materials and resources. Reid had earlier collaborated with MacLachlan (MacLachlan & Reid, 1994) in the development of what they called an interpretive framework, which outlines four kinds of frames L1 readers use when making meanings from what they read.

Table 3.6 Interpretive framework (MacLachlan & Reid, 1994, p. 3-4)

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extratextual frame - Using information from a reader's background (including a reader's background knowledge and experience) to understand and interpret a text.</li> <li>2. Circumtextual frame – Using information from the cover of a text, such as the title, abstract, footnotes, advertisements for a text, to understand and interpret the text.</li> <li>3. Intertextual frame – Relating information from other texts to content of the text being studied (or vice versa) to understand and interpret the text being studied and perhaps also the other text/s.</li> <li>4. Intratextual frame – Using cues from within a text, such as subheadings, chapter titles, recurring symbols, formatting of the text, to understand the text.</li> </ol> |
|--|

As MacLachlan and Reid acknowledge, in the context of discussions about meaning making and literacy practices, these frames are just as relevant to the meaning making of writing as they are to meaning making in reading. One important frame from this list that is a crucial aspect of academic writing and reading relates to 'intertextuality', which was firstly coined by feminist literary critic Julia Kristeva (1980). Kristeva argues for value of locating a common cultural experience through shared knowledge of related texts, and she suggests this helps to create mutual cultural understanding amongst readers and writers from different cultures. She advocates for an awareness of intertextuality, since it can help writers to write themselves into the social context in which they are writing. (This links to the notion of identity work which is so crucial in my Chapter 11 discussion.) Bazerman (2004) argues that when writers utilise intertextuality in their meaning making, that writing can foreground the shared ground that people from different cultures or contexts may stand on, and pragmatically it can prompt readers or writers to pay attention to some issues which they may not otherwise have thought are relevant (Bazerman, 2004, p. 53). As a PhD student myself, I have often found myself stimulated to think more broadly, or to think outside my immediate sphere of experience, when explicitly appreciating the 'intertextuality' in someone else's text (e.g., the extensive and

intensive reading I have undertaken of journals and books in my research field). As a reader, I use what I have learnt and acquired from prior reading from other writers or even from my own writing to make sense of any new text I am reading; as a writer, I produce texts in direct or indirect response to what I have read and written before. In this sense, Bakhtin's dialogic theory offers me conceptual tools for looking into how the interplay of voices and perspectives as I, as well as my participants, write or read. In the end, as Bakhtinian scholars argue, it is not possible for us to make meaning from language in a text without awareness of its dialogic relationship to other texts. Language cannot really be understood outside of time and outside of context. As Volosinov (1986) says, every utterance (spoken or written) is responsive to, and in dialogic interplay with, past utterances, and anticipates future utterances perhaps in future texts yet to come.

Chanock (1997) has researched the relationship between writers and the materials they read – that is, their use of intertextuality – by looking at the ways students reference those materials in their academic essays. And she has investigated the ways in which students feel willing or able to use first person pronouns in different academic disciplines. Chanock begins by challenging the idea that academic writing should never say “I”, although she acknowledges that various ‘rules’ have developed over time which appear to prevent this in different disciplinary writing. She goes on to argue that for some disciplines, such as History, students are encouraged to write from a distance and never use “I” because they are taught that they have no relationship with the primary resources. For other disciplines, such as Literature, English, Drama, Media, and Philosophy, a writer may explicitly show their presence in the writing, and in the knowledge they are creating, through the use of various degrees of personal tones in their academic writing. Nevertheless, Chanock says (as if to invoke Bakhtin) there is always an “I” who responds to these reading materials. Her argument is that L2 writers at university need to not only be aware of the value of making explicit links to related texts that have informed their own thinking, but that even if certain disciplines discourage the use of first person pronouns in their writing products, they should still appreciate the value of themselves and their experiences when developing their L2 academic writing. (In all respects, this thesis can be read as my paying heed to Chanock's recommendations from my point of view as a Chinese researcher writing a PhD in English.)

## Revising

The last vital cognitive writing strategy I want to discuss in this section is ‘revising’. In my own English academic writing, revising is an extraordinarily significant part of my practices. According to Eliot (as cited in Clanchy and Ballard 1981), all writing involves much “wrestl[ing] with words and meanings” (p. 53), and it invariably takes several drafts to produce a quality academic text. Flower and Hayes (1981) assert that a first draft tends to be ‘writer-based’ in which the ideas are organized according to the writer’s cognitive map in his/her mind. However, what writers do during revision is based on their awareness of their intended readers and the expectations of a text with respect to genre and style. For this reason, academic writers tend to constantly modify and adjust style, tone, presentation and other features of the essay to align with readers’ (and in the case of academic journals, editor) expectations.

The crucial status of revising in academic writing has been emphasized by many researchers (e.g., Nold, 1981). Mu and Carrington (2007) find that Chinese student writers writing in English continuously revise and edit multiple drafts of their papers. In response to student writers’ own self-critique, and comments from their professors, these students reflect on and sometimes adjust their writing goals, then reread what they have written and make some revision as they deem appropriate. With regard to the contents of writers’ revision, Nold (1981) claims that skilled writers make their revision at the level of argument or content first, and then proceed to revise at the sentence level. By contrast, he claims, unskilled writers are only preoccupied with the sentence-level revision. Moreover, in Silva’s (1993) study on how ESL writers revise their work, he finds that revision indeed poses a great challenge for ESL writers and they are likely to revise at a superficial level.

I prefer to surmount Faigley and Witte’s (1981) definition of revision, which regards it as an activity the writer gets involved in after completing an initial draft with the purpose of tidying up and eliminating certain surface features. I would say this neat and tidy way of looking at revising process may help some novice writers organize and straighten out their writing steps, and also remind them of the importance of both mechanical correctness and content. However, writing, as a dialogical activity, may not be able to be always carried on in this ideally neat format. Revision, for most of my participants, occurs at any time in their writing. One of them said that it was difficult for him to define the particular starting point and ending point of his revision activity in his writing because he was constantly involved in the circle of drafting, reading, negotiating, adding, deleting, elaborating during his composing processes. Therefore,

writers cannot be locked into one particular stage and only work on one specific aspect of written text. In this sense, it is in conjunction with De Larios, Murphy and Manchon's (1999) argument which points out that the borderline between drafting and revising is not evidently identifiable. In so doing, both inner speech and outer speech occurs at various points in the writing process. Writers may consistently take stock of ideas and re-work the texts so that they consistently transform the adopted word, position, or version of word into a new word, position or version. This kind of movement of position taking is contextualized by virtue of differences, otherness and relatedness (Larrain & Haye, 2013).

### ***Metacognitive dimension of L2 writing***

While numerous educators and researchers stand up for the use of cognitive strategies in language learning, Wenden (1998) particularly addresses the function of metacognitive knowledge and strategies in L2 learning. Metacognitive strategies are related to self-regulation in writing processes. Through effective self-regulation, writers are more likely to be "active participants in their own performance rather than passive recipients of instruction" (Paris & Winograd, 1990, p. 18).

### **Thinking**

As an important theoretical concept concerned with thinking, I examine Chinese postgraduate students' 'inner speech' related to academic writing in this study. Inner speech refers to an uncertain level of consciousness directed to oneself and not so much verbalized (Moffett, 1982, p. 231). In other words, it is the speech with only one locator playing the role of speaker and listener at the same time. Vygotsky's approach to inner speech places more emphasis on the dynamics of inner speech, namely, it is structured with relatedness and otherness. He points out that consciousness comes in the form of differences and borders with others, as foreign consciousness. Volosinov and Bakhtin explicitly propose the dialogical nature of one's consciousness. It is ongoing ideological encounter between the foreign consciousness and one's own (Larrain & Haye, 2013). Rather than being a sort of monologue, Larrain and Haye (2013) adopted the metaphorical sense of dialogue to explain the discursive nature of consciousness: "every act of discursive comprehension involves an interaction between positions, is a response to previous positions, and is addressed to someone as an expression of a new position" (p. 10). As streams of consciousness serves as the wellspring of writing (Moffett, 1982), I explore how Chinese research students regulate their thinking in English academic writing, in particular from the perspective of its dialogic nature.

In particular, I am interested in how students mediate their ideas in writing processes because with this dialogic movement in their minds, they are more likely to create a number of disordered ideas and chaotic thoughts.

## **Planning**

The most widely used metacognitive strategy in language learning and writing tends to be planning. Ellis and Yuan (2004) report a study of the effects of three types of planning conditions – pre-task planning, unpressured online planning, and no planning - on 42 Chinese ESL students' written products. The results show that pre-task planning leads to clear formulation of ideas and text fluency, and unpressured online planning results in more opportunities to monitor and edit their written texts. However, writers in no planning conditions have to face some negative consequences in terms of the fluency, complexity, and accuracy of their written work compared with that of the planning groups. Mu and Carrington (2007) find that participants in their study paid much attention to the planning activities at the outset in terms of making a mental plan or having some general ideas about how to proceed the writing. A good plan could facilitate writers in organizing and managing their writing effectively and logically.

Much research shows that planning is by no means a one-off event. According to Flower and Hayes (1981, as cited in White, 1988), “planning is not a unitary stage, but a distinctive thinking process which writers use over and over again during composition” (p. 9). Clanchy and Ballard (1981, pp. 49-51) distinguish the differences between “planning” and a “plan”, and point out that planning is a continuous process of “analyzing”, “selecting” and “ordering”, while a “plan” is a guideline of the way writers are supposed to structure their writing. In Zamel's (1983) study on six advanced ESL students' composing processes, he claims that students construct a roughly developed outline on which they base their writing at the outset. However, since they may come up with some alternative solutions as they proceed, they modify their discourse or even change their direction as it becomes necessary.

Although I find that planning is the stage which some of students tend to dismiss when I am teaching ESL in a secondary college, my participants, as research students at universities, use it to come up with some ideas and wrestle with those ideas. Also, the process of gathering ideas is consistent and ongoing, and is not constrained from pre-writing stage. When they have some ideas in their minds, they negotiate and evaluate them, which leads to some new or modified



ideas. This resembles the discursive nature of inner speech proposed by Larrain and Haye (2013). Inner speech is realized in the ongoing and dialogic movement, which consists of a constant negotiation and redefinition of ideological territories. Tensions and differences between the retrospective and prospective, or the given and created, are paramount to the dialogic movement of position taking or ideas using in their writing (Shotter, 1993).

This chapter has presented a critical review of a wide range of research on L2 writing practices. Some major issues concerned with L2 writing have been identified and discussed, such as rhetorical features, writer's identity, planning, reading and revising. These issues help me to frame some important dimensions of this study, which I explore in my Chinese postgraduate participants' English academic writing.

The next chapter explains the rationale of choosing narrative-based inquiry and case study as well as the methods of collecting and reconstructing the accounts of these Chinese researcher-writers.

## **PART THREE: METHODOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY**

## **Chapter 4 Methodological Matters**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes and provides a critical rationale for my epistemology, methodology, and the different aspects of the research design of this study. I begin with an explanation of the epistemological position of the study, which includes a rationale for employing particular qualitative research methodologies to create knowledge, and particular research methods to generate data that can be used in the creation of that knowledge. I then discuss the use of a combination of two qualitative methods – case study and narrative-based inquiry – which I employed to present and analyze the data for my project. The next section moves to a description of the selection and recruitment of participants and the approaches taken to generating data. Finally, I present the different methods I employed in analyzing my data and a brief discussion of the ethical issues in this study.

### **4.2 Epistemological position**

Maynard (1994) describes epistemology as the philosophical underpinnings for “deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Maynard, 1994, p. 10, as cited by Crotty, 2003). In articulating my particular epistemological position in this study, I need to provide a philosophical rationale for the design plans I put in place and the methodological decisions I made in the course of my PhD research. I began this study working with broadly constructivist paradigms of knowledge and knowledge making, and as the study has progressed, I have narrowed this general notion to focus more on a Bakhtinian dialogic epistemology in particular. In this section, I tease out what I mean by this notion of a dialogic epistemology and how this has influenced my methodological decisions.

Social constructivists typically strive to examine a complex phenomenon as a whole, and foreground the ways in which knowledge of this phenomenon is inextricably associated with its historical, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler, 2010). Constructivism, as it relates to methodology, is open to a wide range of epistemological positions, and these all tend to be sceptical of any notion of a fixed objective reality. Rather, individuals (or social groups) are seen as constructing and developing their own understandings of reality in different ways based on their experiences and the contexts in which they are living.

These constructions, and one's perceptions of these constructions, may change with respect to the changes of culture or the changes of individuals' experiences or the contexts they are embedded in. Creswell (2007) suggests that constructivist researchers tend to accept the existence of multiple realities, and tend to be very interested in the complexity of phenomena. For my research topic, English academic writing is widely viewed as a richly complex, sometimes idiosyncratic, phenomenon which is practiced or enacted in different ways across the world (Carrington & Mu, 2007). Different L2 writers, in different cultural contexts or different historical periods, invariably have different understandings about their L2 writing. Their perceptions may be influenced by a variety of factors, such as their educational backgrounds, their language proficiency, and the contexts in which they are writing. As I embarked upon this journey of inquiring into Chinese postgraduate student writers' English writing practices, my grounding in constructivist epistemology encouraged me to pay particular attention from the very outset to the ways these contexts and factors influenced Chinese postgraduate writers' understandings of their English writing practices.

However, I soon began to realize that to speak of constructivism in these broad ways would not get me far, in terms of clarifying the nature of the knowledge I would be generating in and through this study. With more reading and research, I sought out a more specific and appropriate epistemology for my inquiry in these student researcher-writers' understandings. Over time, I came to adopt what Parr (2010) identifies in his research as a dialogic epistemology, drawing on Bakhtin's dialogic theory, as my philosophical paradigm in this study. Bakhtin's perspective of truth and the search for truth in the world emphasizes the inherently dialogic nature of language and truth. As he says: "truth is ... born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of dialogic interaction" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110). As a student of language, and as a researcher-writer, it is perhaps not surprising that I have found Bakhtin's dialogic conception of language provides me with a viable framework to inquire into the complexities and nuances in Chinese postgraduate researcher-writers' English writing practices from a dialogic perspective.

This study explores a number of issues concerned with Chinese postgraduate students' English writing, such as their writing processes, the strategies they adopt in their writing, and the ways they negotiate their identity in and through their writing. These issues are influenced by, and interrelated with, each other. In order to make any claim about the experiences or practices of Chinese postgraduate writers in Australia, I have needed to consider the dialogic relationships

within and between these issues in order to tease out the inherently dialogic sense of English academic writing and language. Informed by this dialogic epistemology, I employ some traditional scholarly practices of inquiry but I also unashamedly use some dimensions of “personal engagement” (Parr, 2010, p. 71) in my research. Rather than totally distancing my personal engagement to writing from my research practices, I use my own reflexive narratives to explore multiple perspectives and to provide a space for critically scrutinizing the knowledge claims I make at different points in the study (Le Ha & Viete, 2007).

With an awareness of the importance of dialogic epistemology in this study and my intention to carry out my research based on Bakhtin’s dialogic conception of language, I next present my research design – a combination of case study and narrative-based inquiry.

### **4.3 Research design**

My particular qualitative research approach allows me to probe into the dialogical relationships between diverse issues concerned with Chinese postgraduates’ experiences of writing in English in different contexts. The greatest strength of qualitative research, according to Silverman (2009), is its ability to “get under the surface in order to understand people’s perceptions and experience” (p. 5) and to “analyze what actually happens in naturally occurring settings” (p. 351). In order to ‘get under’ the surface of these natural happenings in the lives of my participants, I seek out and listen to their stories, and I both re-present and explore these stories with a “deep-angle lens”, enabling me to examine the breadth and depth of their experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2000, p. 31).

#### **4.3.1 Case study**

##### ***Definition and characteristics of case study***

The qualitative research design for this study combines a case study approach with narrative-based inquiry methods. Case study practices have different meanings for different researchers in different disciplines (e.g., Gomm et al., 2004; Merriam, 2009). My discussion of the version of case study methodology that I employ in this project is constructed around (1) questions about what constitutes a “case” (e.g., Stake, 2005); and (2) discussion of different characteristics of case study (e.g., Merriam, 2009).

Stake (2005) regards case study as less of a method (or series of steps) and more of “a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 443). He sees case study as an in-depth description and analysis of “a bounded system”; that is, a system or set of phenomena with discernible boundaries (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Although scholars hold different views on whether it is necessary to define the boundary at the beginning of the research (Simons, 2009), from very early in the study, it was clear to me that I wanted to investigate Chinese postgraduate students developing their academic writing in English. These would be my ‘cases’. However, it was not until I had conducted interviews and begun to analyze these interviews that I was able to finalise my decision that there would be four cases (selected from amongst the interviewees) and, as a participant researcher, I would be a fifth case. At this point, I made the decision to explore in detail five (including myself) Chinese students’ experiences of developing their academic writing in English as they undertook their postgraduate study in English in Australian universities.

Merriam (2009) discusses what she sees as the distinctive attributes of case study. She defines case study as being “particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (p. 43). *Particularistic* means that case study focuses on a particular situation or phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). In my study, I selected the five Chinese postgraduate students (including myself) as cases that would enable me to investigate and compare their English academic writing practices and experiences. The Chinese researcher-writers (including myself) constitute a diverse range of students, in terms of their individual backgrounds and English academic writing experiences. I do not consider this diversity as an inhibiting factor in developing my awareness and understanding of Chinese writers’ English writing practices. Rather, the diversity has allowed me to generate richer insights into the complexities and nuances of their English writing practices, and it has discouraged me from forming glib generalisations about ‘all’ Chinese postgraduate students’ experiences of writing in English.

A case is a complex and particularistic entity because it can occur in a number of settings – physical, social, historical, economic, educational, and so on (Stake, 2003). Since my participants’ experiences are socially situated (Simons, 2009), I have been very conscious of my participants’ biographical data both in my interactions with them in our interviews and in my (re)presenting and analysing the stories they told me. In presenting their narratives, I have endeavoured to make explicit the social and educational contexts in which the students are working (and have worked) in order to offer clues for better understanding and interpreting the

stories of their experiences. This aids in making sense of individuals' experiences in specific socio-political contexts, and it has helped me as a researcher to understand not only how socio-political factors affected the behaviours of participants in this study and also the impact of these factors on the individuals themselves (Simons, 2009, p. 69).

Merriam (2009) is concerned that each case study should be characterized by "thick description" (p. 43). Simons (2009), too, observes that many case study researchers are keen on telling a whole and integrated story which involves a rich and thick description of lived experience. Clandinin and Connelly (1994, p. 76) would agree with this approach, when they argue, "A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of personal and social history" (p. 76). However, it is important to see the storytelling as not a simple translation of experience into words, but rather a representation of a lived and changing experience because "in the telling (we researchers) reaffirm [participants' stories], modify them and create new ones" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 415). In order to convey my understandings of the participants' experiences, I seek to describe their lives and attempt to (re)construct narratives of experience descriptively in five short narrative case chapters (Chapters 5-9).

I am keenly aware of the importance of inquiring into multiple perspectives of each Chinese postgraduate student by using multiple sources of data (Yin, 2012). Each case I will be presenting is different in subtle and not-always-subtle ways, and each participant has strengths and weaknesses and idiosyncrasies that need to be understood and appreciated when attempting to generate insights. Although I have been conscious of the fact that as a researcher I have been interacting with social human beings in interviewing them, and therefore my interactions were always different, I have continually checked for consistency in the data generation *approaches* I have utilized across the multiple sources, and I have been conscious of the need to use narrative in ways that are based on the logic of my investigation and meaning making that I outline in this chapter (Gillham, 2000).

Merriam (2009) uses the term '*heuristic*' to describe the analytical framework that a case study employs to clarify, illuminate or perhaps challenge readers' understanding about an issue or phenomenon in the study. In the process of representing the vignettes and narratives that the participants' shared with me in our interviews, I am conscious that my representations may perhaps challenge readers' existing understandings, and they may confirm readers' expectations of what they *feel* they know. In some cases new meanings will be forged and

created through the process of readers interpreting and making sense of my representations. In some instances, these stories may call into question existing research understandings of Chinese postgraduate students' experiences of writing in English.

### ***Why case study***

Merriam (2009) argues that the particular focus of a case study will shift depending upon what the researcher wants to know and access. She further explains that case study design can be helpful for a researcher who is looking for information about characteristics of a given population or area of interest (p. 50). Early in the planning of my research, I established that I wished to inquire into five Chinese postgraduate researcher-writers English scholarly writing practices, and that I would be paying particular attention to the difficulties they encounter in developing their academic writing in English (e.g., imprecise expression or awkward syntactic structure), the strategies they use to prepare for writing (e.g., seeking support from their supervisors), and the activities they undertake in the course of their writing (e.g., planning, making lists, and revising). Yin (2003) claims that researchers are more likely to deploy a case study strategy when their research has something to do with “how” and “what” questions, and when they concentrate on a contemporary phenomenon in real-life settings. One focus of my research questions is to explore *how* Chinese postgraduate students have learned and continued to learn to write in English especially (but not only) in academic genres. I am as interested to know *what* factors mediate and shape their English writing practices as I am to know *how* they negotiate their researcher-writer identities in English academic writing.

Furthermore, because I wish to investigate the phenomena of these students' research writing and developing their academic writing in a real-world everyday setting, I appreciate the way that case study method values the generation of data in natural or authentic or everyday contexts, whereas other approaches rely on what Yin (2012) and others call “derived data” (e.g., questions in a survey, or an intervention ‘instrument’ in a social science ‘experiment’). The capacity of a case study approach to manage a range of data generated in ‘everyday’ settings allows me to get close to the research issue and shed light on multiple variables which are of great importance in understanding the phenomenon. I am able to explore a wide range of activities involved in English academic writing processes and practices in authentic settings (e.g., planning, reading, revising activities when Chinese researcher-writers write their PhD/Master's theses), and to consider various factors, such as postgraduate Chinese students' cultural, academic, and social background, which influence their English writing either



explicitly or implicitly. Influenced by Bakhtin's (1981) dialogic theory of language as well as some other researchers (e.g., Lillis, 2003; Matsuda & Tardy, 2007; Viete & Le Ha, 2007) who have engaged with dialogic theory when inquiring into the experience of L2 students learning to write academic English, I pay particular attention to the dialogic relationship between my participants' English writing experiences and the contexts in which they are embedded (Kaufhold, 2015).

### ***Concerns about case study***

Although case study is a relatively common inquiry approach, there are inevitably some concerns associated with it. McDonough and McDonough (1997), for instance, argue that findings of a one-off case study which deals with an individual or individuals in context fail to allow extrapolation to a wider population. Case study's unique, situated and deep perspective on individuals, which is also its strength, means that the data in my study cannot be simply generalized across all Chinese postgraduate researcher-writers studying in all universities in all English speaking countries. However, in this respect, Merriam (2009) argues that much can be learned from the narrative description in a case study. Regarding my study, the cases I am generating do not aim at exploring all Chinese students' English academic writing experiences and practices, as if each experience could be a clone of another, but I probe deeply my selected cases. Through analyzing these participants' stories and experiences, I am able to show *some* factors that might be considered as consistent across different contexts and I can equally show how a particular context can have a significant impact on the particularity of an individual's experiences.

Where possible, I am interested to consider if, "how and in what ways my findings may be transferable to other contexts or used by others" (Simons, 2009, p. 164). Stake explains how knowledge transfer from one case study to another might work: researchers "will, like others, pass along to readers some of their personal meanings of events and relationships – and fail to pass along others. They know the reader, too, will add and subtract, invent, and shape – reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leaves it...more likely to be personally useful" (Stake, 2005, p. 455). In the writing and comparing of cases, I consciously take care to enable readers to retain a clear sense of the five participants' (myself and the four others) "slices of life" (Merriam, 1998, p. 42), even though there is a temptation to produce neat and tidy findings that actually bear little relation to the lived reality of most Chinese postgraduate students in Australia. I am aware that the knowledge I claim in my research pertains to be specific, situated

and both time dependent and context dependent. In this respect, the knowledge I produce tends to be “context-dependent knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 221). I intend to leave the knowledge I have built in my study to my readers to determine what can apply to their contexts (Merriam, 2009) as this knowledge is invariably situated, dynamic, multifarious, and open to change.

Another common concern about case studies is related to what Merriam (1998) calls the ‘sensitivity’ and ‘integrity’ of the researcher. Having the researcher playing an explicit and significant role in the data generation poses some potential concerns that qualitative case study research must address. Some of these concerns include: ethical problems, the potential for personal bias, and the possibility that one’s particular social, cultural and political context may blind the researcher to certain perspectives or considerations. Given these concerns, throughout the research process, I attempted to develop a good rapport with my participants and remained keenly aware of the context and all the variables within the discipline-specific studies of the different participants. One way I did this was by exercising caution in the interviews I conducted by avoiding probing irrelevant personal issues (See also section 4.6).

More importantly, as subjectivity is inevitable and unavoidable in all research, especially for case study in which the researcher is an inescapable part (Simons, 2009), I take great care in the writing of the thesis artefact to explicitly situate myself and my theoretical standpoint during all phases of the research. In doing so, I seek to demonstrate “reflexivity” (Simons, 2009, p. 91) in my research process. For instance, in the various autobiographical writing that I present, I seek to identify and make explicit how my sense of who I am as a researcher and Chinese postgraduate student (including the importance I feel of maintaining my hybrid Chinese identity throughout this study). I also try to make explicit my values, emotions, preferences, views, and cultural background and suggest how this might potentially influence my research process and my analytical insights. In this respect, I agree with Bentz and Shapiro (1998) who regard all research processes as an ongoing conversation between the researcher and the text – that is, something to be consciously and intentionally interpreted and reinterpreted in the social process of research. Therefore, when I present my analysis and make certain knowledge claims on the basis of this analysis, I adopt various means of critically engaging both the intellectual and emotional dimensions of my research. This means writing myself into the text. For example, I have written an autobiographical preamble which openly and critically presents my own views (e.g., my understandings about the challenges I

encountered in English writing) and English academic writing practices (e.g., the strategies I used to improve my writing and conversations I was involved with others during my postgraduate writing). I also integrate relevant autobiographical narrative-based texts, such as a quotation from a poem I wrote when I was an undergraduate student in the University in China, or an incident from my personal or research life, within my other more analytically focused writing (Simons, 2009).

Coffey (1999) notes that a researcher's "selves and identity are fragmented and connected; open to shifts and negotiations. They are ambiguous, the outcome of culturally available and defined interactions, actions, meanings and values" (p. 35). Therefore, when I seek to make explicit the role of my 'selves' in this study, I am conscious of the unstable nature of these 'selves'. Indeed, I, like all researchers, have multiple selves due to different social, cultural and ethnic details of my biography. For instance, a part of me is/was: a girl going to school in China; a postgraduate student pursuing postgraduate study in an Australian university; a PhD researcher-writer in an Australian university; and a language teacher teaching in an Australian government secondary school. These selves suggest sometimes quite different life and research agendas (Simons, 2009). My efforts to make explicit these agendas are intended to enhance the reflexive rigour of the research, to clarify the knowledge claims I make through this research and to situate the conclusions I reach by the end of the study.

As my case study is bound up with studying the everyday 'lived experience' of participants, it is inevitably linked with story or narrative which I began to discuss above. The use of narrative and storytelling to represent and inquire into educational experiences has gained considerable prominence through a body of work that has come to be called narrative inquiry (e.g., Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Richardson, 1997), although this literature now includes a hugely disparate range of approaches and theoretical frameworks, resulting in sometimes very different paradigms of research (Doecke & Parr, 2009). In the following section, I present and discuss narrative-based inquiry, which is another important research method in my project.

#### **4.3.2 Narrative-based inquiry**

##### ***Why narrative-based inquiry***

We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. (Hardy, 1968, p. 5)

Embedded within my research methodology of case study, I engage in some practices associated with narrative-based inquiry (Parr, Doecke & Bulfin, 2015) in order to generate richer descriptions and critically reflexive perspectives on my research cases. Over the last two decades, narrative has gained momentum both as a term used in educational research literature and as a research approach used across various disciplines (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Richardson (1997) explains the power of narrative as follows:

If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experience of people, if we wish for a union with poetics and science, or if we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we study, then we should value the narrative. (p. 30)

Some researchers claim that people are narratively hard-wired by their very nature (e.g., Webster & Mertova, 2007). If that is the case, then it is possible to argue, as many researchers have, that narrative allows people to make sense of their own and others' lives effectively because of its capacity to address the complexities, nuances and subtleties of humans' everyday experience through the representation of personal stories rendered in textual form. Moreover, as stories do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by lifelong personal, cultural and community narratives, they are constantly re-constructed due to the changes of the settings people are embedded in (Webster & Mertova, 2007). A similar notion is also expressed by Carr (1986), who argues that narrative pertains to our way of experiencing, acting, feeling and living; thus, in a research context it offers a way of representing people's experience of life.

Over the last twenty years, narrative inquiry in different manifestations has emerged as a popular research approach to educational research. Connelly and Clandinin (1990), two of the earliest proponents of narrative inquiry, speak of the ways in which narrative offers an approach to make sense of human experience through examination of both personal and social stories. Some traditions of narrative inquiry, as suggested by Webster and Mertova (2007), claim to be able to capture the 'whole story' in terms of space and time. Thus, narrative offers the potential for researchers in education to explore details, complexities, contexts and stories of human experience of learning and teaching (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). However, my intention in presenting stories of Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing practices and my own stories is not to attempt to capture the 'whole story' because stories should only be regarded as an aspect of the self rather the whole self (Lensmire, 1998, p. 287). Other researchers (e.g., Kamler, 2001; Summerfield, 1994) warn against romanticized representations of the research 'power' of stories and narratives. They argue that since stories

(like any other representation of phenomena or experience) can only ever capture a perspective and a particular way of making sense of experience, they are necessarily “partial” and “located” rather than complete and universal (Kamler, 2001, p. 45). Rather than making triumphalist claims about the ability of narratives to tell the complete story and thus to represent the complete objective truth, some researchers discuss the ways that working with narratives can enable them to be reflexive, nuanced and therefore more rigorous in inquiring into educational phenomena or practices. This can be done through constructing narratives in self-conscious and theorized ways, and thus recreating a perspective on the everyday world that is honest about the partiality of this perspective.

Much recent research in education, using narrative approaches, involves autobiographical components (Etherington, 2004; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2006). This study follows these traditions. I present myself first as a Chinese student in a Chinese high school, then as a university student, sometimes as a Chinese teacher of English, then as a Chinese student writing a PhD in English. In all these instances, I position myself as a critical storyteller of my own English learning and writing experiences (in educational and other contexts). I am conscious of occasionally weaving my values and beliefs in and through my thesis as well as comparing my own stories while analyzing my participants’ stories about English scholarly writing experiences. I construct accounts of my development as an English writer that pertain to my family life, school life, my study at university, and my various work contexts. By doing so, I provide a multifaceted version of my personal, professional and scholarly life as a writer, one which is characterised by ongoing efforts to grapple with language and meaning. This helps me to critically consider the shaping impact of the experiences I have had and the paths I have taken, as I have grown and developed as an English writer, educator and researcher.

Moreover, in my study, I am more aware of narrative-based inquiry’s capacity to investigate the individual’s “inner experience” through rendering their experience in language (Webster & Mertova, 2007). I do this through using critical theories to shape and craft that experience in the form of narratives, to illuminate participants’ inner and outer worlds, and lastly to analyze their experiences and practices in the narrative cases I present in Chapters 5-9.

### ***Dialogic use of narrative-based inquiry***

Bakhtin’s dialogic theories of language play a vital part in the theoretic framework for my research. As a philosopher and a literary scholar, Bakhtin speaks about the novel as a

profoundly dialogic genre due to its potential to move beyond a single monolithic authorial narrative; this means it is able to capture a multiplicity of sometimes conflicting voices. These voices, he says, can be heard in different characters, each having “specific world views, each characterized with specific objects, meanings, and views” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 292). As Bruner and other researchers have shown, narrative based research, unlike “logico-scientific language, inhabits a realm of potential, of possibility, of uncertainty, contradictions and silence” (1986, p. 11), is more likely to create multiple meanings and even contradictions. This is a view that sees narrative not as a representation of a singular voice but rather as a text that is dialogically shaped by the previous histories and backgrounds of the characters. Such a narrative can present the emotional and social context of these characters and the situation being described (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000; Scott, 1992). My use of narrative-based inquiry is, to a large extent, congruent with what Parr (2010) writes about “the dialogic conception of narrative” (p. 46). He advocates for research that adopts narrative in reflexive, rigorous and hybrid ways, which can involve the telling of stories or construction of narratives, but also less obviously narrative styles of writing that are more focused on analysis of language or issues. I am keenly aware of the need to contextualize and historicize my participants’ English academic writing practices in order to see how they are mediated by culture, context, and history, and how these can all shape current and future experiences. For example, describing the participants’ English writing experiences in educational institutions both in China and in Australia helped me inquire into factors that influenced these students’ understandings and practices of English academic writing.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out the major ways in which narrative inquiry differs from more traditional empirical research methods. In their view, narrative inquiry should be related to: (1) temporality, (2) context, (3) people, (4) action and (5) certainty; and they regard these elements as intricately inter-connected. As far as my narrative-based inquiry approach is concerned, these elements influence and are influenced by one another. For example, in various stories that I tell of Chinese research students’ English writing experiences it is important that I show their writing actions as drawing on certain existing practices, which are enacted by other students across the world, but their own particular practices that they speak about must be shown as situated with respect to time (*temporality*) and place (*context*). I show how the time and place of these practices are often influenced by particular details of the students’ schooling and academic histories (*people*). I also show, where possible, how they as *people* are influenced to varying extents by their cultural backgrounds or *contexts*. I portray the ways in which they

approach with *certainty* aspects of their research such as linguistic translations between English and Chinese, or the ability of a research document to accurately represent truth, for instance.

In all of this, I keep in mind the need to contextualize my storytelling with respect to time and space, such as temporal context, spatial context, and context of other people. This notion of narrative-based inquiry being mediated by time and space means that conclusions are almost always provisional (e.g., Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). In the form of narrative-based inquiry I use in this study, the provisionality of the interpretations is emphasized, recognizing that certain phenomena or experiences could always be otherwise under the circumstances or when participants bring to the experience quite a different range of cultural and social backgrounds. Bearing in mind the unstable and dialogic nature of language, it follows that narrative will communicate and provide insights into experience and yet these will always be “characterized by an intrinsic multiplicity of meanings” (Carter, 1993, p. 6). I try to make explicit that the meanings which readers will make of the stories I tell or relate, and the analysis I present, will invariably be multiple not singular. Indeed, plenty of researchers argue that this is the case for all research, whether or not it makes explicit use of narrative (see Hamilton, 2005). The difference is that reflexive narrative inquiry claims to be more intellectually honest in making its provisionality explicit (see Bruner, 1986; Parr, 2010; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). My own use of narrative is less about presenting the ultimate truth and more about providing a space for rich description and rigorous reflexivity in order to explore my participants’ English academic writing experiences. While analyzing my own and others’ stories, I endeavour to “make visible the puzzles of mind” (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011, p. 8) through explicit presentation of various forms of evidence, stances, theories and even inner voices and indirect speech. As I do this, I draw attention to the many contextual factors that mediate, on the one hand, my research practices, and on the other hand, the everyday experiences of my participants with regard to the past, the present and their perceptions of the future.

Parr (2010) is among a handful of researchers suggesting the more participatory and dialogic possibilities of narrative. In his longitudinal study of the inquiry-based professional learning of a small group of teachers in a secondary school in Australia, he uses multi-faceted narrative-based research texts to portray the individual and social professional learning of those teachers. In presenting his narratives, he makes explicit that the narratives are not just representing the professional learning actions and activities of himself and his participants in the study’s fieldwork. They are also reflecting back on the way in which the acts of writing these narratives

are a crucial component of his ongoing professional learning in undertaking the study. Other researchers who also advocate this dual standpoint in research, such as Ritchie and Wilson (2000), Kamler (2001), and Cole and Knowles (2000), see dialogic narrative approaches to research as opening up a form of reflexive inquiry that benefit participants and the research alike.

My research draws particular attention to the social elements in narrative. Some researchers (e.g., Doecke & Parr, 2009; Parr, 2010; Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2003) appreciate that narrative-based inquiry can foreground the co-constructed nature of narrative and of knowledge, and they wish to show how such narratives both draw on and help to construct “forms of social code” (Squire et al., 2003, p. 5). Doecke and Parr (2009) say that “narratives in all their diversity and multiplicity make up the fabric our lives; they are constitutive moments in the formation of our identities and our sense of community affiliation” (p. 66). At the same time that narrative-based research attempts to capture the multiplicity of voices involved in the social world it is representing, it should also acknowledge that the meaning of any single narrative is not fixed. Rather, it is mediated by social relationships among the participants and their relationship with the researcher. An awareness of these dimensions helps, in turn, to give meaning to the lives represented in the narratives. In my study, I borrow some of Parr’s (2010, p. 53) strategies concerned with foregrounding the dialogic nature of narrative by making explicit references to the mediating influence of particular voices, such as by quoting the researcher’s voice (making explicit when they speak in either Chinese or English), presenting the researcher’s voice as important in its own way, carefully referencing other researchers’ voices from debates in the literature, and citing various policy, literacy and institutional texts throughout the thesis (both in Chinese and English) that may potentially influence a voice.

Parr (2010) argues, in his book, that there is an unstable dialogic relationship between the narratives he composes and the combination of older traditions of narrative writing (scholarly and non-scholarly) as well as “newer” narrative research ‘genres’ that may emerge perhaps in response to his research. In this way, his use of narrative can be seen as contributing to ongoing dialogic activity in research and ongoing development of generic potential in the particular areas he is writing about. Influenced by Parr’s conception of the dialogic nature of narrative inquiry, my version of narrative-based inquiry always takes into account connections with existing narratives in my research area while keying into the ongoing development of narrative research practices in the literature.



#### 4.4.2 Methods of data generation

In order to take account of complex issues concerned with Chinese postgraduate students' academic writing within Australian universities, and to ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, I sought multiple sources of data as shown in the Table 4.3 below. The range of data enables me to offer a richer and more comprehensive perspective on the Chinese postgraduate students' writing experiences in Australia universities (Patton, 2002). I now explain in detail each of my data generation methods, beginning with the questionnaires I prepared for the participants in the first phase of data generation.

Table 4.1 Overview of sources of data in this study

Source of data	When	Length	Language used
Preliminary questionnaire	February/March 2011	Approximately 10 minutes to finish	English
Semi-structured interviews	May-July, 2011	Approximately One hour	Mainly in English; occasionally in Chinese
'Talk around text' interview	July-October, 2011	Approximately One hour	Mainly in Chinese; occasionally in English
Follow-up interviews (email or face to face)	2011-2017	Variable	Chinese

#### *Questionnaires*

The participants were given the prepared questionnaires (See Appendix 2) soon after they agreed to participate in my study. I was guided in the forming of the questionnaire items by Bakhtin's (1981) dialogic theory, which foregrounds the essential role of 'context' in language activities (or 'speech events' as he calls them). Thus, in the first part of the questionnaire, I asked the participants to provide demographic details – including gender, age, research discipline, and English proficiency – so that I could generate rich biographical profiles. I needed this information to help me develop a better knowledge and understanding of the varying historical, cultural and social backgrounds of the participants in the study (Lillis, 2008).

In the second part of my questionnaire, I drew on Mu's (2007) questionnaire which contains 100 questions in a 5-point-likert-scale form to investigate students' L2 writing strategies. Keeping my three primary research questions in mind, and not wishing to overwhelm or make unreasonable demands on the time of my participants, I refined Mu's (2007) questionnaire into 15 items. I organized the questions into three broad categories as follows:

- 1) views about English academic writing (i.e., the nature of academic writing; feelings about writing in English);
- 2) strengths and problems when writing in English (i.e., confidence when writing in English; critical thinking in English academic writing);
- 3) strategies used in English academic writing (e.g., talking with others in writing process; the role of reading in writing process)

The participants indicated, via responses on a 5-point-likert-scale, how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement in the questionnaire.

There were two primary objectives in this preliminary questionnaire. Morse and Richards (2002) claim that data gathered early in a research process may help a researcher to develop further tools of collecting information in the next step of the research task. It was never my intention to use this questionnaire to pin down definitive knowledge about the participants' views. Rather, I wanted to use it as a dialogic 'warming-up activity', prior to the semi-structured interviews that would follow. This means that the questionnaire was able to prepare participants' thinking and reflection about the kinds of issues I would be asking about in the interviews. It also meant I could adjust the particular questions I asked, and the way I asked them, in response to the participants' answers to the questionnaire items. What is more, it stimulated the participants to reflect on their English academic writing experiences and perhaps be more aware of their writing strategies than if I had asked a battery of questions in interviews with little or no preparation time. It seemed to me that answering questions in the questionnaire helped some participants sort out and better understand their thoughts about their English scholarly writing experience.

This stage of data generation was quite effective and useful. Before the interviews, I analyzed participants' answers to the questionnaire and found out which responses needed further clarification or explanation. For example, one participant said that she believed writing in English was very different from writing in Chinese. This prompted me to probe further this idea in my interview with her. I was able to follow up and ask her specifically what she meant by her comment, 'writing in English is very different from writing in Chinese', and then I proceeded to explore with her the underlying reasons for her thoughts about the differences, as well as asking about her particular experiences of writing in Chinese.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

Although the questionnaire allowed me to accumulate a range of data in a relatively short time, its limitation was always apparent to me in terms of the depth of data I could be generating. In contrast, the interviews that I conducted as a follow up to the questionnaire allowed me to generate, and probe further, participants' views and reflections about their English academic writing experiences (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). Robson (1993) makes a distinction between interviews based on the degree of structure or its formality. He categorises interviews as: fully-structured, semi-structured interview or unstructured. In my project, I conducted extended semi-structured interviews (See Appendix 3) for which I created a set of questions to start with – I did not share these with participants before the interviews, because the questionnaire was expected to prompt their thinking in this way. In the course of the interviews, I proceeded to adjust or modify both the wording of the questions and the order in which I asked them. I also offered explanations, where these were needed by participants who were unclear of the meaning of the question; and consistent with Wengraf's (2001) recommendation, I sometimes left out a question at a particular stage of the interview if it seemed redundant or inappropriate.

Mishler (1991), like Baker (1997), believes that interview questions serve the role of shaping the grounds on which the interviewer and interviewees can communicate. My specific interview questions were organised around the main research questions of the study, while some sub-questions, which were concerned with a variety of issues related to each main research question, were also considered. For example, some interview questions were concerned with self-perceptions of participants' strengths and challenges in English academic writing, their sense of identity in the English scholarly writing they did, the support they received from universities/faculties, and the role of reading and communicating with others during the writing processes. Beyond this central set of concerns in the interview schedule, I was keenly aware during the interviews themselves of the variations in how particular respondents understood my questions (Mishler, 1991). Thus, I sometimes needed to re-phrase some questions during the course of an interview, and also to ask interviewees, by re-phrasing their response, if I had correctly understood what they had said. In this way, my participants and I were involved in a form of co-construction of the stories of their experiences and perceptions. For example, I understood that one of my participants, Ada, would be embarrassed when talking about her supervisor's comments on her written texts, when she told me about the nature of the negative comments she sometimes received. I had to be very careful in the way I posed my questions if I wanted to encourage her to talk about her honest and real feelings

about this kind of comments. My approach in this situation was to share my own experiences with her, and rather than asking about her attitudes towards some comments directly, I started my line of questioning with ‘What are your current thoughts about the issue you wrote in the questionnaire?’, ‘Have you changed your view?’, and ‘If so, why have you changed your view?’

For each of the four participants I chose to present in my narrative cases (Ada, Helen, Shane, and Susan), I conducted one extended semi-structured interview and this was held at times convenient to the participants. Also, the interview location was decided upon based on participants’ convenience. Most of them were central meeting rooms within the faculties in which they were studying. Each interview took around one hour. All interviews were audio-taped with the participants’ permission. Audiotapes are convenient and reliable, and they enable the researcher to have access to original data at any time (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). I conducted the semi-structured interviews almost entirely in English with only occasional contributions in Mandarin. As all of my participants were pursuing postgraduate research programs as ESL students, I initially assumed that their English language proficiency would guarantee smooth and unproblematic communication in English. However, I soon realized that some participants felt uncomfortable or dissatisfied describing their understandings and feelings precisely and accurately in English, and so I encouraged them to respond in Chinese when necessary in the ‘talk around texts’ interviews which I discuss in the next section.

Many researchers (e.g., Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003; Minichiello et al., 1996; Mishler, 1991) propose multiple advantages of employing semi-structured interviews, which persuaded me to regard it as a suitable research method for the purpose of this research study. The first key advantage of the semi-structured interview is that it is interactive in nature (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). There is important alignment here with the dialogic theoretical framework that underpins my whole study. I wanted the interview to be a “conversation with a purpose” (Webb & Webb, 1932, p. 130), but this meant I myself needed excellent communicative skills as the interviewer. In an attempt to establish a good rapport with my participants, I spent several minutes in informal conversation with each participant when we first met for the interview, and I subsequently began the interview with some relatively simple questions close to their everyday lives, involving more easily accessible memories (e.g., Do you have memories about English writing in China?). In addition, I accounted for the fact that interviews were likely to be fraught with issues of power and potential coercion (Lichtman, 2006). Hence, I tried to produce an interpersonal and relaxed atmosphere by sharing with my interviewees my own

role as a research student. I wanted to show some of the ways I was like them, in terms of being a Chinese postgraduate student studying a PhD in Australia. Although I attempted to put interview questions in a straightforward and non-threatening fashion, I understood that my participants had their own expectations of interviews and that my prepared questions might have many possible context-bound meanings (Mishler, 1991). Therefore, in order to achieve a shared understanding, my interviewees and I sometimes worked through repeated reformation and specification of questions and responses. Where appropriate, I adopted familiar colloquial language rather than technical jargon or terms from my particular disciplinary community when asking my interview questions (Merriam, 1998). This was another part of my strategy of making the participant feel more comfortable with the interview experience. For example, when asking interviewees about their strategies for developing coherence in their writing in English, I used 'linking words' rather than 'conjunctions', 'referents' or 'substitution' to describe various linguistic concepts.

The second significant advantage of semi-structured interviews lies in their flexibility (Legard et al., 2003). Although, as stated earlier, I had prepared a version of the interview protocol covering a list of general issues and questions concerned with the research topic in advance, I was conscious, as Mishler (1991) recommends, that interview discourse should be jointly constructed by both interviewer and interviewee. Therefore, the structure was sufficiently flexible which allowed both the interviewee and myself to be responsive to each other's wishes, to develop and explore some issues in depth in response to each other's interesting and meaningful statements, or to clear up some misunderstandings occurring in the process of interviews. In this way, interviews in my study were composed of overlapping stories and dialogues generated by both interviewees and me rather than monologues generated by only the interviewee or the interviewer.

The flexible nature of a semi-structured interview calls for adaptability on the part of the researcher (Legard, et al., 2003). Sometimes interviewees appeared to be over-emphasizing tangential or even clearly irrelevant issues. In that case, I needed to steer them back to the topic or redirect them to a relevant point. For example, when I asked one interviewee about her English academic writing problems, she seemed to want to talk about her friend's writing experiences. I tried to bring her back on track by asking questions like, "What about you?", stressing 'you' in order to obtain a more relevant response. One potential limitation of using the semi-structured interviews was that some of my interview questions had to be left out due

to the freedom to pursue certain interesting comments which participants made. In that case, I emailed the participants after the interviews, and invited them to add any additional response to these other questions that they may wish to. At the same time, they were also welcome and free to contact me after the interview regarding any of our interview questions.

Thirdly, Legard et al. (2003) point out the value of researchers in semi-structured interviews having the flexibility of employing ‘probing questions’ to elicit deeper and fuller information in the interviews. When I felt interviewees’ answers appeared to be vague or incomplete, I probed for more details and more clarification. For example, I was quite fascinated with one participant’s comments on his way of dealing with a supervisor’s feedback on a paper he had written. I was able to ask probing questions, such as ‘Could you tell me more about this?’ or ‘What do you mean by...?’ I also used some non-verbal techniques, such as pausing, a quizzical facial expression or sustained eye contact, to indicate my desire to get more information at certain points.

The second interview with each participant was conducted in the form of ‘talk around texts’, which I discuss in the following section.

### ***‘Talk around text’ interviews***

A number of researchers have adopted a text-focused approach to inquiring into different aspects of academic writing (e.g., Bazerman & Prior, 2004; Hyland, 2006). One particular study was Lillis’s (2001) investigation into the experience of ten English students as they engaged in academic writing during the first year of undergraduate study in the UK. Lillis employed a ‘talk around text’ approach to explore different perspectives on the writers’ texts and their writing practices in a deeper and more rigorous way. The focus on what the writers do in texts and how they understand what they do signals a shift from the assumption that a writer’s challenges in writing are separate and distinct from language, where language is seen as a somehow transparent and autonomous technology, to an appreciation of the central role of language in writing. It appreciates that writing is one dimension of meaning making (Lillis, 2001) rather than some mechanical translation of what is pre-existing in the writer’s brain. Lillis (2008) claims that the use of ‘talk around text’ allowed her to investigate academic writing through an emic/insider lens, which is pivotal to extend the researcher-analyst’s gaze beyond the text and look into individual writer in her/his socio-historical writing trajectory.

Drawing on a modified version of Lillis's (2001) study, Tran (2011) did a case study on how four Chinese and Vietnamese international students from two disciplines at an Australian university, Economics and Education, mediated their ways of displaying their critical thinking in academic writing. Her study included four talk around texts, focusing on the exploration of their practices in demonstrating their critical thinking in their first texts at the university, and four in-depth interviews six months later, which aimed to examine how they negotiate their writing practices as they progressed through their course.

Lillis (2008) argues that many 'talk around text' studies tend to focus on the text, while talk is collected and analyzed as separate almost supplementary data. In that case, researchers, who take a so-called 'textual analytic lens', are likely to investigate written text from the view of an 'outsider'. In my study, for instance, this might have resulted in my overlooking the significance of *context* in the kinds of practices a participant uses in academic writing. In developing my own approach in interviews to 'talk around text', I once again drew on Bakhtin's dialogic theory (1981; 1984), encouraging the participants to describe what they had written in a particular text, but also to reflect on the situated processes of their writing. Often the conversation shuttled between *describing* a text and *reflecting* on a text and *describing* and *reflecting* on the ways in which the text was created, and I would repeatedly draw the participant back to specific details in the text.

Lillis (2001) adopted ethnography as a methodology in her study which used multiple data sources. Often talk around texts involves conducting text-based interviews or surveys to supplement the textual analysis (Paltridge, 2012). For example, Peng (2010) combined text analysis with talk around text in her study of Chinese PhD students' acknowledgement texts. She examined 80 Chinese PhD thesis acknowledgment texts from a major Chinese university in the areas of Classic Chinese, Computer Science, Genetic Engineering, and World Economics to explore both the structure of the texts as well as their social function within the particular university setting and within a broader social context. In order to explore the reasons for their textual choices in their writing, she interviewed PhD students, and supervisors as well as other people who were referred to in the texts. However, in my study the talk around the participants' texts ended up being less focused on structural details of the texts and more about the *process* and *experience* of creating and editing the texts.

In my research, I invited participants to send to me one or two excerpts from their theses or journal articles written in English. I adopted some of Lillis's strategies when interviewing my participants about their English academic writing (e.g., the choice of words, the length of sentences, the rhetorical methods employed to build a sense of authority in the writing, and the strategies of dealing with reviewers' or supervisors' feedback) - see Appendix 4. Moreover, I added 'why' questions into my project in order to tease out the underlying factors which mediated and influenced their English academic writing. Rather than setting up the predominant specific research focus for each written text in advance, the points arising from our discussion about each participant's draft of written paper/essay were responsive to the issues that had been raised in my first interview with each participant about their English academic writing.

#### **4.4 Recruitment of participants**

Before explaining the methods I used to generate data for this study, I must explain how I selected and recruited the participants for the research.

I mainly used two means of recruiting my participants: posting advisements (see Appendix 1) on notice boards in different Australian universities and using word of mouth communication via my personal networks in those universities. I intended to recruit four to seven Chinese postgraduate students studying in Australian universities as my participants for my early design plans. I purposefully set out to select a smaller number of participants for my study, in anticipation that I would develop in-depth case studies from my interactions with some or all of them. As Patton says, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). That is, information-rich cases are more likely to offer rich variety and potential for investigation (Patton, 1980).

According to Silverman and Marvasti (2008), one of the advantages of a qualitative research design is that it allows greater flexibility for selecting participants than in most quantitative research designs. I initially interviewed seven potential participants for this study from three different universities located in Melbourne. Urban University is a high profile research-intensive university. Both Sunshine University and Focus University are smaller and less well funded universities. The table below summarizes seven interviewees by their pseudonyms (except for myself) and their main demographic information.



Table 4.2 Interviewees' demographic information

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Discipline of research</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Progress in their course</b>
Don	26	Male	Information Technology	Sunshine University	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year of PhD
Ada	33	Female	Education	Urban	4 <sup>th</sup> Year of PhD
Mandy	29	Female	Information Technology	Sunshine University	4 <sup>th</sup> Year of PhD
Shane	28	Male	Engineering	Urban University	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year of MEng
Joe	29	Male	Chemistry	Sunshine University	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year of PhD
Helen	32	Female	Information Technology	Focus University	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year of PhD
Susan	29	Female	Education	Urban University	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year of PhD
Myself	29	Female	Education	Urban University	PhD student

My study ended up focusing on four of these interviewees. I did not include the cases of three of the participants in my final thesis (Don, Mandy and Joe) because: 1) some of their stories about English writing experiences were very similar to other participants' stories – for example, Don's English writing experiences in China, the challenges he encountered in English writing, and the strategies he used to solve problems in writing were very similar to parts of Shane's stories and Helen's stories; 2) For most of the interviews I conducted with these participants, they struggled to reflect on their writing practices in any meaningful way – it was evident that they had rarely, if ever, reflected on their writing practices, and despite my efforts to gently draw out stories and insights, these rarely if ever emerged from the interviews.

I eventually selected five students (including myself), who are summarized in the Table 4.3 to present in a series of narrative cases (see Part Four) due to several reasons. Firstly, because they had English writing experiences both in China and in Australia for different purposes, I expected that these experiences would have been more likely to enrich their perceptions and

reflections on their English academic writing practices in their postgraduate degrees in Australia. Secondly, I wanted to be able to inquire into the perceptions and experiences of students from a variety of disciplines in an Australian university at the time of the research. As it turned out, the responses to my invitations to participate in the research and the quality of reflections that emerged from my interviews resulted in not as wide a cross-section of disciplines as I had hoped for. In the five cases I reported in detail, there are three different disciplines represented in Chapters 5-9, which constitutes a modest range. It might have been valuable to have a wider variety of disciplines. However, my decision to report on these five cases was driven by: (i) the limited number of responses I received to my invitations to participate; and (ii) the richness of the interview data rather than the diversity of disciplines. It was crucial for the immediacy of the interview responses when interviewing students that they were literally in the process of writing scholarly written texts (their Master's or PhD thesis and in some cases also additional scholarly articles for publication) at the time I spoke with them. This also meant that they were in the midst of some level of dialogue about their written texts with their thesis supervisors, other postgraduate peers, and possibly even journal reviewers. Since my epistemological position in this study would be to talk with my participants about their everyday practices and contexts, it was important for me to be able to carry out my interviews with students when their writing experiences were fresh in their minds.

Since I too am a Chinese postgraduate student studying in Australia, I shared some of the linguistic and cultural backgrounds as these four participants, and so I expected my immediate experience would also be potentially a point of comparison. I suspected that my "insider" knowledge of some of the participants' educational backgrounds and contexts might allow me to empathise with and more sensitively analyze their experiences (see also Cumming et al., 1994). For example, according to my experiences as a PhD student in the Faculty of Education and my personal conversations with friends from other disciplines, the quantity and quality of writing required of Education students is at least as rigorous as that required in many other disciplines because in fields like Education, language and writing play a fundamental and constructive role in the development of knowledge (Langer & Applebee, 1987, as cited in Riazi, 1997).

Table 4.3 Final list of selected participants with their demographic information

Name	Age	Gender	Discipline of research	Progress in their course
Ada	33	Female	Education	4 <sup>th</sup> Year of PhD
Shane	28	Male	Engineering	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year of MEng
Helen	32	Female	Information Technology	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year of PhD
Susan	29	Female	Education	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year of PhD
Myself	29	Female	Education	PhD student

## 4.5 Methods for data analysis and interpretation

Data generated in the study tended to be in ‘raw’ stories and reflections, which Patton refers to as “undigested complexity” (Patton, 2002, p. 463), and there were several stages of analysis and interpretation that were necessary before I could present the narrative cases of the four selected participants (and my own narrative case). Much of my data analysis drew on Fairclough’s (1995) three important facets in examining qualitative data: description, interpretation and explanation. I mainly took the following steps to make sense of the generated data. In line with Fairclough’s framing of qualitative research, I see data analysis not as a linear and neat procedure, and so I have continued to work on the data back and forth during the whole process, revisiting it and sometimes revising my analysis of it while writing chapters, according to the new knowledge I have gained in my research journey.

- 1) The audio-taped interviews were transcribed prior to analyzing the data. For most of parts which I used Chinese in interviews, they were first transcribed in the original Chinese, then translated into English. Since all the participants spoke English as a second language, there were inevitably some grammatical errors in the transcription. I did not make changes in those instances unless they seriously interfered with understanding of the content of what they were saying (see Appendix 5).
- 2) I read through interview transcripts and undertook some content analysis, which involved “identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labelling the primary data” (Patton, 2002, p. 463). Based on my research questions, I sorted out the most frequently shown points in my transcribed data. In this way, a number of codes (e.g., reading, thinking, revising, talking, planning, linguistic problems, ideas, support, supervisor,

and samples) were developed, and the relevant segments of data were reorganized into a particular category (e.g., writing processes; writing difficulties; writing strategies; and identity), allowing me to make sense of multiple lines of “disordered” data (Minichiello et al., 1990). Then the differences and commonalities in the interviews were analyzed.

- 3) I wrote initial drafts of individual narrative cases in which information about each case was organised and synthesized. In each narrative case, I generated a complex and multi-faceted account of Chinese postgraduate students’ English writing practices, what seemed to ‘work’ for them, what problems they faced and how they addressed them, some characteristics of their English writing, some factors mediating those students’ writing practices, and their researcher-writer identity in English academic writing. This part of the analysis process involved probing parts, pulling apart and putting them together again in a complicated process of meaning making (Patton, 1980). Based on the codes I developed, I categorized the data from each participant into three main categories: (i) English writing experiences in China and understandings about English academic writing; (ii) the main activities (e.g., planning, thinking, talking, drafting, and revising) they undertook when writing an English scholarly text; and (iii) student researcher-writer identity negotiation. I continued to refine and hone these narratives to ensure clarity of the themes, their connectedness to my research questions, and the fluency and engagement of the story. I reviewed and integrated all data sources and tried to ensure that each narrative was able to represent each participant’s understandings and experiences about English academic writing in relation to my research questions. The individual narrative cases allowed me to tease out each participant’s individuality and yet also generate some provisional overarching insights into various issues concerned with the research topic.
- 4) After writing the five narrative cases (including my own), I conducted a form of cross-case analysis, in which I compared the similarities and differences in the experiences of these four participants. In light of the research questions and the conceptual framework established from literature review chapters, I identified two chapters to discuss about the data I generated: Chapter 10, “Dialogic Writing Practices”, and Chapter 11, “Inner Dialogue, Cultural Hybridity and Heteroglossia.” Working back and forth between the data, I ‘winnowed’ and organized these larger initial codes into smaller and critical themes under each chapter. In Chapter 10, I identified and discussed

four categories of ‘dialogue’ involved in the students’ developing English academic writing: 1) interpersonal dialogue; 2) intrapersonal dialogue; 3) intertextual dialogue; and 4) intratextual dialogue. In Chapter 11, I identified three key themes that I believe encompass the complexity in Chinese postgraduate researcher-writers’ identity work: 1) generating and managing the ‘inner dialogue’ associated with Chinese and English writing practices; 2) researcher-writer identity work; 3) factors mediating researcher-writer identity work. These themes formed the basis for my discussion and analysis in the study.

## **4.6 Considerations of ethical issues**

Qualitative research often deals with matters of people’s personal views and circumstances, and this study was no exception. It was vital for me as a researcher to exercise great caution both in the way I ‘probed’ into participants’ views and experiences and also the way I presented their stories in the narrative cases. For instance, it was crucial that I protect the participants’ identity and privacy (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). I tried to keep in mind the ethical research principles proposed by Knobel and Lankshear (2004) when recruiting participants: (1) have a valid research design; (2) obtain informed consent; (3) minimize intrusion into their normal lives; (4) ensure confidentiality; (5) minimize risk of harm; (6) demonstrate respect; (7) avoid coercion or manipulation; (8) look for ways to enable reciprocal learning with the participants. Based on these principles, I took the following actions for the sake of the ethical concerns above.

Firstly, I only began to search for participants after I had constructed a valid research design after more than two years part time research in the area of international students’ experiences of academic writing in English. I ensured the advertisement for the study clearly stated the purpose of the study and that participation would be voluntary. For this, I needed to obtain informed consent from each potential participant (all participants subsequently signed a consent form – see Appendix 7) in ways which avoided any potential coercion or manipulation. These potential participants were advised that their participation was entirely voluntary; their privacy was fully protected and the information they provided was unidentifiable; and they could withdraw at any stage of the project.

Secondly, when I was conducting interviews with the participants, I needed to demonstrate respect for them as fellow postgraduate researcher-writers, to minimize the effect of any intrusion by me on their normal lives and their sense of identity and where possible to seek ways to make the participants' experience of taking part in my research a positive professional learning experience for them. In presenting their stories and data in the thesis artefact, I needed to ensure confidentiality by the use of pseudonyms. I also ensured they knew that they did not have to answer questions in the questionnaire and interview if they did not feel comfortable to do so. Moreover, in order to ensure the accuracy of my research data, I sent each participant a copy of the transcribed data. After the first round of data analysis, I sent them the emerging findings, and invited them to respond to my initial data analysis. Their responses helped me to stay faithful to their words and stories as much as possible.

Lastly, I took into account the power issue in the relationship between the researcher and interviewees when carrying out the individual interviews. As I explained in section 4.4.2, I endeavoured to create a relaxed atmosphere as well as maintain my position as a good listener with the purpose of encouraging participants to engage in the conversations. What is more, I have been explicit about acknowledging that I have used my personal network in recruiting some participants. In those instances, the participants' trust in me as a known figure appeared to encourage them to be open and outspoken in the interviews.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has included a comprehensive range of perspectives on the methodology I have worked with and the particular methods I have employed in this study. It began with an articulation of my epistemological rationale in developing the socio-constructivist paradigm of qualitative study. I moved from there to explain the research design I settled upon and the research methods I employed in recruiting and selecting participants, and then how I generated, analyzed and presented the data for this project.

In Part Four that follows, I present five narrative cases of Chinese postgraduate students, using narrative to convey a range of their experiences, beliefs and perceptions of English academic writing in Australia. I present my own autobiographical narrative case first, in which I describe and critically reflect upon a range of professional and academic writing I have engaged in as a Chinese language teacher in a secondary school in Australia and as a researcher pursuing a

PhD. I follow this with four chapters devoted to each of the four participants' narratives about their experiences of English academic writing.

## **PART FOUR: NARRATIVE CASES**

## Chapter 5 My Autobiographical Narrative

What matters is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmuring of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make fiction, new narratives. (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 37)

In this chapter, I situate myself as one of the participants in the series of case studies on English academic writing. I firstly present a reflexive narrative in which I explain and reflect on some feedback practices I enact in my teaching of Chinese as a second language. As a secondary school language teacher, in a state school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia, I am keen on telling stories about my teaching practices in the form of written narratives and reflecting on those stories. I agree that “we tell stories to make sense of ourselves and our experience over the course of time, and to help us seek meanings to cope with our changing circumstances” (Grant & Leigh-Phippard, 2012, p. 846). In the narrative I present below on feedback practices in my classroom, I go on to explain how narrative, as a form of professional writing, goes beyond simply storytelling and becomes a tool for professional learning about so many aspects of my teaching and professional identity.

### 5.1 An autobiographical narrative about feedback

#### 5.1.1 My narrative

*It was a beautiful afternoon. I had just taught my last class for the day, and was feeling quite content about that teaching. Back at my desk in the allocated staff work spaces, I had just started to mark 25 essays written by my Year 12 Chinese students, when I received a phone call from one of our assistant principals, Kate. She indicated that she wanted to have a meeting with me regarding a recent survey of senior school students at our school about their teachers’ teaching practices. My heart began to beat more quickly. Usually, Kate would be the last person to make me feel anxious or stressed. The youngest assistant principal I have ever worked with, I regarded Kate as a role model in my professional life. Yes, she was a member of the leadership team, but she was so friendly and I deeply respected her wealth of expertise and management ability. And yet her tone sounded quite serious. What had I done wrong?*



*When I arrived in Kate's office, her manner was as usual respectful and friendly, but she was also quick to get the point. She briefly reported to me some comments about my teaching that one of my Year 12 students had written in the survey. The student – I did not know who it was, because the surveys were anonymous – suggested that in the indirect feedback I had given to him/her was unhelpful. It was not detailed and did not include explicit correction of all errors she/he had made in his/her writing. The student believed this kind of feedback somewhat hindered his/her understanding and did not help his/her learning. Kate asked for my thoughts on this suggestion. I explained to Kate what I had done regarding the feedback I had been providing in my Year 12 teaching. Our conversation went on very smoothly. Rather than criticising me, Kate was supportive as usual, giving me many constructive suggestions.*

*The conversation we had that afternoon was a valuable moment of professional learning for me, about feedback, about what might be effective feedback, and why. I appreciated the opportunity to have this dialogue with a respectful fellow professional about my feedback practices, and how they related to other aspects of my teaching. Kate and I swapped and shared stories of teaching and professional learning which consisted of many twists and turns. I came away from the conversation realising that there was much room for me to improve, but also I was excited by the possibilities of the kinds of narrative-based professional dialogue I had just been engaged in with a member of my leadership team.,*

*To the best of my knowledge, corrective feedback (e.g., direct correction of errors) is perhaps the most widely used feedback in the teaching of second language writing (Chandler, 2003). However, for over a decade, L2 writing teachers and researchers have been involved in a vigorous debate on the value of this corrective feedback in L2 writing pedagogy (Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum & Wolfersberger, 2010). Around about the time of my conversation with Kate, I began to read more methodically about feedback practices in L2 or ESL teaching. I was shocked when I first read Truscott's (1996; 2007) claims about the ineffectiveness and potential harmfulness of 'error correction' based on his practical and theoretical arguments. He believes that error correction is a "clear and dramatic failure" (Truscott, 2007, p. 271) because it is likely to frustrate learners, erode learners' confidence, and undermine their learning processes. For example, one response to this approach to feedback is for students to*

*avoid using complex structures in their writing to avoid making errors, and thus ensure their writing has fewer errors. However, at the same time, I also read the work of other researchers (e.g., Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Chandler, 2003) showing that feedback in the form of ‘error correction’ or ‘error feedback’ is a potentially useful editing tool, and can improve students’ writing accuracy over time.*

*As a novice teacher, the uncertainty around this issue confused me. I struggled to identify the best practices and specific steps that I could take to help my students write more confidently, accurately and fluently. In this respect, my experience as an early career teacher was consistent with the ways in which Britzman (2003) conceptualises the learning of pre-service and graduate teachers. Coming to understand the complications and yet also the connections between theory and practice in teaching can be challenging. At that period in my life as an early career teacher, I did what I knew was essential for my professional learning: I talked about this with some of my colleagues who were very experienced L2 teachers.*

*I learnt that rather than asking whether I should be using ‘corrective feedback’ or not in all situations, the more important question was: how do I best respond to students’ needs and wants in their unique and specific learning contexts? Even though one student’s survey comments showed that he/she was not pleased with my feedback, I did not feel that I should completely change my approach to providing feedback on all student work. The story of how I came to that conclusion is an interesting one. Reflective writing plays an important part in that story. It helps me to explain how I, as an early-career Chinese born professional teacher in Australia, was building my understandings, knowledge and identity as a professional and as a researcher.*

### **5.1.2 Professional response to feedback from others**

I include this narrative in my thesis, partly because it relates to some of the issues that the other participants in this PhD raised about the kinds of feedback they have appreciated in their time as postgraduate students writing a thesis in Australia. More importantly, though, I wanted to include a narrative which illustrates the ways in which writing, in this instance, professional writing about the teaching I was doing while I was enrolled as a PhD candidate, was contributing to the development of my academic writing. I go on now to analyze the ways in which my scholarly writing in English mediates my learning, and *vice versa*, and the ways in

which it contributes to the ongoing development of my identity as a professional teacher and researcher-writer.

Prompted in part by that conversation with Kate, I began to talk with colleagues, both in formal meetings or in casual chatting, about how each of us was giving feedback in our classrooms. After these chats, I worked out the table below, which is a list of my approaches to giving feedback to students in my teaching of Chinese as a second language. I hoped this would facilitate more thorough and methodical reflection on these approaches.

Table 5.1 Feedback practices I have used in my teaching

1.	Criteria are explained before writing. The completed criteria sheet is attached on some important essays when they are given back to students.
2.	Providing written feedback on the essay. Most of this written feedback tends to be ‘indirect feedback’ (e.g., underlining errors but not correcting them, giving prompts to stimulate student reflection, providing suggestions, or asking questions). ‘direct or corrective feedback’ is also used when I feel this is necessary (e.g., correcting students’ linguistic mistakes on their essay, rewriting some of their sentences or modelling the correct use of a structure or syntax).
3.	Providing oral feedback to the whole class (summarizing students’ common problems and explaining how to correct them)
4.	Providing individual oral feedback. This involves talking with students, during or after class, about their problems and strengths in their writing
5.	Sharing and discussing good essay samples from students. If possible, sharing excerpts of a few problematic essays from students to elicit more discussion.
6.	Sometimes I set up my classroom so that peer assessment and peer feedback are used.

Space constraints prevent me from discussing all of these approaches, but I do want to explain the reasons behind the use of ‘indirect feedback’, since I have sometimes wondered why this term is more problematic compared with the others. At the very beginning of my teaching, I tended to give students more explicit direct corrective feedback. However, I remember a lesson when I saw students responding to my detailed and in-depth corrective feedback. They just quickly read it and then moved on. Some students literally threw the feedback away, since it was on a separate page. When I asked students why they treated the feedback in this way, they told me that they did not mean to devalue or ignore it. They thought that “reading it” was enough. Also, they suggested that they did not have enough time and energy to cope with the huge amount of information that was in my feedback. Even for some of the highly motivated students I taught, there was a sense that my approach of providing large amounts of detailed direct corrective feedback was not prompting the response and the learning I was hoping to see.

My concern not to intrude too forcefully on students' voices as writers made me change the way I provided feedback to students, so that I began to be more 'indirect', at a time when I was coming to believe that learning to write was a richly dialogic process (Bakhtin, 1986). I needed to encourage students to actively engage with feedback rather than just correcting their errors for them. After analyzing the codes, questions, prompts and suggestions I had been giving students on their essays, I changed my approach. With this change, I hoped the students would engage in guided learning and problem solving, and over time began to feel; that I was promoting "the type of reflection that [was] more likely to foster long-term acquisition [of language]" (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008, p. 415).

I also needed to recognise that the work required in providing direct corrective feedback could be overwhelming for a teacher. I needed to balance my desire to provide explicit feedback – because this was what students said they wanted – with my growing awareness that correcting their errors was not in the best interests of students and their current learning situation. In fact, I needed to make judgements about where and for whom this sort of explicit corrective feedback would be most helpful. For my Year 12 students, they are more likely to be interested in very explicit feedback (with all corresponding correct L2 forms offered by the teacher) because they are mature enough to handle the academic challenges and build up stronger determination to improve their writing more quickly. However, for students in other year levels, it is hard for them to focus on multiple aspects and types of errors simultaneously. Therefore, I would like to spend more time to guide them to think about and process the feedback slowly.

Although I felt that I had developed a solid rationale for my feedback practices, when I received the feedback from my student (the negative voice) and the suggestions from my assistant principal (the supportive voice), I wanted to be an active respondent. In order to obtain a more productive resolution of the dilemma I found myself in, when I perceived and understood their meanings, I wanted to "simultaneously take an active, responsive attitude towards it". (1986, Bakhtin, p. 86). If I may borrow Bakhtin's metaphor of the "chain" in people's communication, I wanted to respond to these voices by taking actions to allow more "links" to connect to the chain which make it most likely to continue. In my case, the "links" tended to work in different ways and relate to different people.

One of the most important "links" involves one of my colleagues in the school – Lina – an experienced and responsible L2 teacher. She kindly took her precious time to undertake some

cross-marking with me. It was a very beneficial and valuable experience. She shared many good strategies about how to comment on students' errors in written essays with me; also this experience allowed me to realize the differences between us in terms of feedback provision. The major difference rested on the specificity of feedback. In addition to more specific and direct feedback, she sometimes wrote a sample or model for students on important points, such as a topic sentence or a few elaboration sentences. I understand that *specificity* in feedback provision is another area of considerable debate in the literature. For instance, some literature suggests that indicating an error and providing the corrected L2 form (direct correction) may promote grammatical development (Suzuki, 2012); it may enable learners to instantly internalize the correct form (Chandler, 2003), and it offers learners sufficient information to resolve complex linguistic errors (Chandler, 2003). Other literature argues that indirect correction methods help L2 learners self-edit their writing and enhance problem-solving abilities (Lalande, 1982), foster vocabulary development (Suzuki, 2012), and encourage L2 learners to experiment with the target language and develop the complexity of their written work (Beuningen, De Jong & Kuiken, 2012). The more I talked with my colleagues, the more I appreciated that in any decision about the specificity of feedback I might provide on a student's written work, I must take account of various factors which I will discuss later in this reflexive account of my practice.

In addition to engaging with the voices from my colleagues, my work as a secondary school language teacher has taught me that negotiating with students' voices is also essential. Indeed, I have come to see that feedback needs to be seen as part of an ongoing dialogue with my students. This dialogue should be responsive to their particular needs in different times (Gill, 2005). After the school undertook its school-wide survey of students about the teaching in the school, I undertook my own survey of my Year 12 students regarding their expectations on how I teach and how I provide feedback. I mainly use guided questions in the survey to give them more freedom and space to specify their needs and expectations on their L2 learning. I was glad to find that most of the results were very positive and my feedback practices were not a common problem in my class. That reassured me about my professional practice in regard to feedback provision. After this initial experience with the students' survey, I conducted a few one-on-one conversations with some of my students, particularly discussing their preferred forms of feedback provision. All of them mentioned the benefits of my oral feedback because they felt that the interactive discussion about their writing helped their understanding and reflection. I also personally liked it as it allowed me to ask for clarification, check the students'

comprehension of my oral comments, help students sort through problems and make decisions. However, time constraints mean that I could not conduct it with every student and on every essay. Nevertheless, if students can be helped by it and if it can encourage a more collaborative dynamic between my students and me (Rasekh, 2011), I felt I needed to take it into consideration.

When I reflect on all of these people's voices in the professional conversations I have detailed above, I appreciate that feedback provision is so complicated that I need to take into account a variety of variables. One of the advantages of undertaking a PhD while still teaching in a school is that the professional conversations about feedback practices in relation to student writing that were taking place in the school were complemented by reading of, and writing about, research literature outside of school. And so I learned that the literature on variables affecting effectiveness of feedback suggests that they can be categorized into three groups: learner variables, feedback variables, and instructional variables (Rasekh, 2011). Regarding my L2 teaching context, I made the following table to help tease out my understandings of what kinds of feedback are appropriate for different students at different times:

Table 5.2 Feedback grouping (drawing on the work of Rasekh, 2011)

Learner variables	Feedback variables	Instructional variables
Nationality Cultural identity Learning style Learning attitude Motivation Future goals Time management skills	Indirect feedback Direct feedback Oral feedback Written feedback Peer feedback	Sequencing Pacing Adequate practice Repetition

Keeping in mind the above variables, I noted two major characteristics of effective feedback practices, as suggested by Evans, Hartshorn, McCollum and Wolfersberger (2010):

- 1) Feedback reflects individual learners' needs
- 2) Tasks and feedback are manageable, meaningful, timely and consistent for both the learner and teachers. (p. 452)

As I engaged further with the article by Evans et al. (2010) – and that once more involved reading and writing on my part – I began to develop a more comprehensive feedback strategy for my teaching, when I had time to implement it. I present this strategy here as a series of

steps, which have been modified from Evans et al. (2010) to make them more appropriate to my own teaching contexts as follows:

*Step 1:* Students write the first draft of an essay in the given time.

*Step 2:* I collect the drafts; respond to the essays in terms of linguistic (lexical and syntactical) accuracy by using error codes; and then return the work to students.

*Step 3:* Students record each error by category on a tally sheet based on the reason for each error; then students correct linguistic errors and submit their second draft. (This is a very important step because students are encouraged to invest in the learning process by reasoning through their errors. However, some weak students need help in this step. Sometimes, I provide more direct assistance if the student is really struggling with this step.)

*Step 4:* I respond to the second draft. In this step, I have two foci. The first one is linguistic accuracy. Unlike the first draft, I use a circle, a question mark or an underline to indicate errors. The second focus tends to be content and structure (e.g., coherence, unity, topic sentence, elaboration). At this step, I tend to give direct and explicit comments/feedback as symbols are not clear enough and the correction of content may be beyond a student's level of achievement.

*Step 5:* Students edit the second draft based on my feedback and resubmit the third draft.

*Step 6:* Cycle continues as time allows. The drafts must be completed in less than one and half a weeks. This time limit ensures that feedback is timely and manageable.

Through my teaching and writing about my approaches to feedback, I am beginning to appreciate how being a teacher is as much a public as a private career. Certainly, relational work – building relationships, responding to the differing needs of different students at different times – is at the core of being a teacher. As I continue my journey of what Britzman (2003) and Feiman-Nemser (2001) call 'becoming a teacher', I am keen on re-thinking about and grappling with a variety of voices from different people regarding the provision of feedback in my professional practices. Now more than ever, I appreciate that learning to be a teacher is an ongoing dialogic process, in which speaking and writing are equally crucial.

## **5.2 Learning through professional and research writing**

For over a hundred years of educational research, teachers have tended to be regarded as objects of study rather than creators of knowledge due to the notion that knowledge about teaching and learning can be ‘transmitted’ to teachers by others (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2002). As a secondary school language teacher, I reject this notion. My experience of writing the autobiographical narrative above, and the subsequent discussion, show me how I can be an active participant in a process of inquiry into learning, developing and constructing new knowledge for my further teaching.

I wrote my narrative for the dual and interlinked purposes of professional learning and undertaking research into my practice development. Both involved a process of reshaping my existing knowledge, beliefs and practices. As an education researcher and as a professional teacher, I was not interested in trying to position myself as outsider of classroom life and seek to quantify generalizable knowledge about teaching and learning (Johnson & Golombek, 2002), I wanted to relate my research to my teaching experience, and my teaching experience to my research, through reflection and inquiry, which involved reading, writing, listening and speaking. In this next section, I conduct a close analysis of the writing I have presented in 5.1, in order to show how this writing contributes to the development of my academic writing practices as a postgraduate Chinese researcher-writer.

### **5.2.1 A close analysis of this narrative writing**

In this section I reflect on some of the issues and processes that were involved in constructing the narrative that appeared at the start of this chapter. As a Chinese PhD student, reflecting here on my writing in English for my doctoral thesis, I am determined to be as honest as I can about these processes. Thus, I am attempting to throw away the disguise of the super confident PhD scholar and to dispel the myth that my writing in English as a second language in my PhD is not so significant. Surely, because I am a PhD student, I want to challenge such mythology and engage with the challenges and strategies that I have found helpful in my writing.

Writing the first complete draft of this autobiographical narrative took me several months. It progressed fairly slowly partly because of the demands of workload from my teaching in the school, partly because of my struggling with the academic and critical writing. Not least of these is the fact that English is indeed my second language. Even though my English academic



language has been improved to some extent in the past few years, it is still an ongoing struggle for me to read and write intensively, as PhD study requires, as freely as I work as a full-time PhD student. As I worked to develop that first draft, I could only write during nights or weekends because of the demands of my work as a teacher, and this raised challenges stemming from the break in continuity of my writing. Every night when I sat down in front of my computer screen, I had to start by referring back to what I had written the night before. Re-reading and re-thinking about what I had done, I almost always came up with more ideas about what I needed to add or what needed to change. Engaging with the text I had written benefited me in terms of clarification of my thoughts and plan for the next part. However, it was very time-consuming.

Another interesting issue that I struggled with was my familiarity with the academic language I was using in my writing. Although as a teacher in a secondary school I am required to write in English for many different purposes in the course of a school term – such as writing students’ reports, corresponding with colleagues and school leadership, writing lesson plans and units of work, and of course providing written feedback for students – little of this involved engagement with complex education theory or discourses. Lacking confidence in my ability to express myself with regard to complex research discourse, I would typically spend at least three weeks reading and re-reading the relevant literature, and taking notes on that reading, even though my supervisor had encouraged me to make a start on my writing. This usually helped me to develop some ideas about what I wanted to write. Even so, when I started writing, I often struggled with some particular discourse or syntactic structures. I had an emerging sense of what I wanted to say, but I did not know how to express it in an accurate, academic and clear way. I would try different ways to develop this clarity, such as checking dictionaries and asking people around me. Sometimes I could work it out, but sometimes I could not find the most satisfactory way of expressing myself until I had engaged with another voice in the ‘heteroglossia’ of my PhD journey: my supervisor’s voice and his commentary on my writing.

Due to the struggling I experienced at the outset of writing, I decided to try out a different style of writing in this narrative. Although I realized that this narrative writing would be for my PhD thesis, I wanted to start my narrative with a very simple and straightforward sentence “It was a beautiful afternoon.” I followed this up a few lines later with, “My heart began to beat more quickly”, and then the short question at the end of the first paragraph, “What had I done wrong?”

I have always been keen to use short sentences in my narrative writing because I believed they helped to make my writing more engaging and lively.

Influenced by Bakhtin's use of the metaphor of "links in the chain" to describe relationships between the different utterances in a dialogue, I have also tried some metaphors in my narrative writing (e.g., "stories of my teaching and professional learning consist of many twists and turns") and some rather colloquial phrases which are not common in traditional academic writing (e.g., "the last person to make me feel anxious" and "get to the point"). In this way, I discarded the assumed academic language structures, such as the use of long and complicated sentences. Although some researchers (e.g., Cooper & Patton, 2007) argue that a rigid language structure can offer writers "a safety net" to save them from the anxiety of producing illogical and disorganized writing (p. 13), I wanted to try some creative and different ways of writing in the scholarly written piece as it made my writing more readable and powerful.

The experience of writing this autobiographical narrative conflicts somewhat with Le Ha's (1999) argument that L2 writers always aspire to use sophisticated language in their writing. I was not always keen on using very 'complicated' and 'academic' vocabulary in this narrative writing. I remember when I started to learn to write academically, the choice and use of academic vocabulary was always a big concern for me because I wanted to make my writing to be more 'impressive' and 'sophisticated'. However, with my vocabulary repertoire developing, I felt more confident and flexible about the choice of technical or colloquial vocabulary in my scholarly writing. The most important criteria for the choice of vocabulary for my writing became accuracy and appropriateness rather than complexity of the vocabulary.

I believe every researcher has his/her own way of writing academically. I did not seek to follow any so-called rule of academic writing in this narrative writing because I agree with Bakhtin's (1981) statement that what one says and how one writes links directly to one's background and ideological values. My knowledge of writing and previous experiences of learning to write influenced me to write this narrative in my way, and this all contributed to the development of my identity as a Chinese PhD student.

Lastly, as Phillion and Connelly (2004) suggest, "Context is crucial to meaning making" (p. 460). Context, which also impacted my writing of this narrative to a large extent, involved my exploring the numerous aspects, such as my students' needs, communication with colleagues,

school culture, as well as syllabuses and education policies (Bax, 2003). All of these elements interconnected with each other, which made my interactions with them even more complicated. I entered difficult terrain in this narrative writing, which arose from the interdependence of all different factors related to the episodes, of product and process, of the forms and meanings. In this sense, my personal narrative became dialogic, as I grappled with a multiplicity of other voices and considerations. In my study, dialogically negotiating with voices from participants in the stories I write is essential. The goal of all activities in the process of my writing – talking, thinking, writing, reading, sharing, analysing and revising – is to make my dialogues with these participants meaningful.

### **5.2.2 The value of this autobiographical narrative for my development as a writer**

Because the writing began in the form of entries into my teaching journal, it is perhaps fair to say that the initial purpose of that writing relates to what Geertz (1995) describes as telling stories (for myself): “I have stories to tell, views to unfold, and images to impart” (p. 61). The original narrative fragments in my journal served primarily as a record of my lived experience as a secondary school teacher and a researcher in Education. The process of combining and reworking these stories into what became Section 5.1 in my PhD involved a multifaceted and complex series of activities. These included: constructing and re-constructing written versions of the narrative; sharing these versions with peers and my supervisors; discussing and reflecting on these stories through a range of spoken and written conversations (e.g., via email, or in the written feedback provided by my supervisors); and then analysing and interpreting my teaching stories. Through this combination of activities, I was able to regulate my thinking, clarify any confusion in mind, recognize dilemmas, and develop professional knowledge. In the pages that follow, I tease out what each of these involved for me in terms of my academic writing practices.

#### ***Regulating my thinking***

I have had the habit of writing professional journals about my teaching for a while, as I believe they could help me to clarify thinking as I continue reflecting on my teaching practices. However, when this incident that I have written about above happened, at the beginning I had doubts about the value of writing it down. This was partly because I believed that the negative voice from my student was causing me to ‘lose face’, and partly because this incident was in relation to many people (e.g., teachers, assistant principals, students) around me which made it even more complicated to write about. However, as a professional teacher, I could not just simply leave behind what happened in my professional career. I needed to follow up and follow

through with actions to make sense of this issue and to learn through it. Writing was an important part of that follow-up.

Initially, the more I reflected on this incident, the more my thoughts began to snowball in a more disorganized and messy way. At that stage, I had to figure out where I was among so much going-on? I continued to work with narrative fragments, trying to work out how one part of the experience related to the next, and how I might best take action to learn and develop from the incident. The process of writing, without at first a clear sense of where the writing was heading, was crucial I can see after all this time. It was for me as Suzuki (2012) explains: “writing may complete people’s thoughts or transform these thoughts into objects for further reflection” (p. 1111). Through constructing, analysing, and interpreting my teaching stories, in effect I was creating a professional space to reflect on my teaching practice and articulate my interpretation of this practice (cf. Barkhuizen & Hacker, 2008).

### ***Clarifying confusions in my mind***

When I raised this incident with a colleague who was both a practitioner and researcher (like myself), I talked about my confusions and my struggle to write about this episode. In response, he sketched a diagram with interconnecting circles to help me clarify what I was talking about. Each circle stood for different strategies I took up for the purpose of making sense of this issue. This included: conducting a survey with students; cross-marking with my colleagues; participating in individual conversations with my students to further explore their opinions; discussing with my colleagues; and reading journals in this area. This was helpful, and yet when it came to writing about them, I realised I could not put these circles into a neat linear story line. They all interconnected with each other in different ways. To undertake more rigorous and effective reflection, I needed to work out the dialogic relationships between these different people/voices in my writing, and as I experimented with this idea the writing started to take on more shape, structure and purpose. In this sense, I agree with Swan’s definition of “linguaging” as the “process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (2006, p. 98). My written linguaging, which took the form of written reflection, allowed me to explain the whole incident to myself in ways that made sense of the complicated ideas I was grappling with (Chi, 2000). The act of writing, of using language and its possibilities, can be regarded as an act of externalizing the inner dialogue that was in my mind (Vygotsky, 1986), and this was helping to clarify the ideas, and importantly build up new knowledge about my practices as an L2 teacher.

### ***Recognizing dilemmas in my professional practices***

When I was working on understanding the dialogic relationships between different people/voices involved in this episode in my writing, I struggled to manage many dilemmas brought about by different voices proposing different ideas, such as whether teachers should use indirect feedback; whether teachers should provide direct corrective feedback. These different voices, one might call them part of the ‘heteroglossia’ of my dialogically linked teaching and researching, prompted me to re-think my views about the role of my reflective writing in my ongoing teaching practices and also in my work as a researcher. I wondered about the tendency some researchers have for romanticising such storytelling or narrative writing in my professional practices and in my research. If I merely tell the story about what happened, how could I make sense of these dilemmas? Rather than skirting round these dilemmas, I needed to engage in robust dialogue with myself in my writing. In order to do so, I needed to tell the story in a more critical and analytical way. I returned to some research literature I had read in this area. For me, the purpose of reading literature was not to find out evidence to totally agree or disagree with either of the two sides (or more) of the dialogue in my mind. Rather, I wanted to deeply engage with different voices about these dilemmas, and through this enrich my understanding and improve my teaching.

### ***Revealing new perspectives***

I have admitted that the final goal I set up when I started writing this narrative was to discover a universally effective solution to the provision of feedback in L2 teaching. In fact, through the process of writing, I realized that the L2 writing feedback provision is so complicated that I need to take into account a variety of variables. What is more, to be responsive to students’ particular needs at different times, I have to be ready for any new perspective coming out at any time, such as how to make the feedback manageable for students and how to differentiate students’ various needs in feedback provision. Naming and then negotiating amongst these different perspectives have become more important to me than seeking out a simple universal strategy. When I am able to take into account and grapple with a ‘heteroglossia’ of new perspectives, I become a more capable teacher and a more critical scholarly writer.

### 5.3 Conclusion

I started the writing of the autobiographical narrative that was the centre point of this chapter, seeking to make sense of the various narrative fragments in my professional journal. Through dialogic processes of presenting, describing, reflecting on, discussing, and analysing this experience, I have sought to show how writing that spans my professional and research lives has helped in the development of my English writing. Johnson (2006) claims that in the field of language teaching “the use of narrative has emerged as a predominate means of understanding and documenting teachers’ way of knowing” (p. 242). In my case, it has allowed me to become more thoughtful and mindful of my teaching work through the multilayered understandings of my students, the class, the school, curricula, and communities my students and I are involved in. Through the complex writing processes I have documented in this chapter, I have shown how I am able to look inward, outward, backward and forward at my lived experience in order to capture its temporal nature and its personal and social dimensions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). As Dewey (1952) explains about continuity of experience, whereby “every experience lives on further experience” (p. 16), I regard this experience as one of the links in my on-going professional learning life. I have shown how developments as a writer in English are inseparable from developments as a researcher in English. All these developments have involved a dynamic interplay between description, reflection, dialogue with self and others, different teaching practices, and experimenting and grappling with different uses of language. As a Chinese PhD student inquiring into Chinese postgraduate students’ English academic writing practices, my writing in this chapter has provided a good opportunity for me to investigate the dialogic nature of all narrative writing.

In the following four chapters, I present narrative cases of the other four participants in my study. I begin with Helen’s narrative.

## Chapter 6 Helen's Narrative Case

When I interviewed Helen for this study, she was in her early 30s, and was a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Information Technology at Focus University. Her PhD research, which she completed soon after my interviews with her, was concerned with fault tolerance in data gathering wireless sensor networks. Of all the participants in my study, she seemed to be the most experienced, confident and productive English academic writer. After completing her secondary education in an elite high school in Sichuan Province, she attended a high-ranking university in China to pursue her undergraduate degree in IT and then earned her Master's degree in the same major in another prestigious university in Beijing. Helen shortened her PhD completion time to two years and, at the time I interviewed her, had already received an offer of a post-doctoral position in the university where I conducted my interviews with her. Helen's stories of writing of her PhD thesis suggest that she worked hard to take control of all aspects of her research and her learning as a writer of English. High levels of diligence and autonomy appeared to have been important contributing factors in her academic and professional achievement. In constructing her case, I have tried to capture these factors in her development as an academic writer in English.

### 6.1 Developing confidence and competence as an academic writer in English:

#### ***"I start my English writing with imitating experts' English written work"***

Helen's first encounter with English was through learning English during junior high school (from Year 7 to Year 9) in China. She could not recall much about those early experiences of writing in English because English writing only took up a very limited part of any exam she was required to sit – another instance of the power of assessment: according to Helen, if it's not assessed, it does not feature as highly in a student's thinking about a subject. She remembered her English teacher placing great importance on being able to write grammatically correct sentences. For this teacher, "the simpler the English writing, the better". In those early experiences of learning English Helen was not encouraged to take risks or to be creative in her English writing, and she did not feel any particular challenge or interest in writing.

Helen said that her "real English writing" began only after she came across a "fantastic English teacher" at University in China. From this moment, English writing began to be challenging

and yet still enjoyable for her. This English teacher put a paramount focus on writing and in every week's English classes she devoted some hours to teaching English writing. Helen remembered her establishing much higher expectations and standards for her students' English writing compared with those of her English teacher in the high school. The teacher at University required her students to produce

nice and complicated sentences in writing; and also try to use some rhetorical methods, such as metaphor, parataxis and so on. Also, logical relations in sentences or paragraphs needed to be addressed to ensure coherence and fluency. (Helen, interview 1, 10/5/2011)

Besides her teacher's new pedagogy, with greater time devoted to teaching of writing, the up-to-date teaching and learning resources this English teacher used at that time also inspired her to a large extent. In contrast to the English textbooks she learnt from in high school, which she felt were "boring" and "outdated", Helen reported that in addition to using the *New Concept English 3* resource book (He & Alexander, 1997) her teacher recommended many contemporary news articles with authentic issues associated with daily life and different professional areas in China and sometimes in English speaking countries. Helen was attracted to these more complicated sentence structures and the use of varied rhetorical methods in these varied and contemporary English texts; they were more "vivid" and "interesting".

Helen said she improved her English writing skills by imitating the various short texts she read and engaged with from *New Concept English 3*. Different themes of articles served as models for her to imitate, including syntax variation, sentence and paragraph structure, as well as various rhetorical devices, such as metaphor and repetition. In this regard, Helen's story bears out Crawford, Lengeling, Pablo and Ocampo's (2013) idea about how non-native writers learn to write. They state that non-native writers need to firstly get acquainted with authentic texts through reading and then "copying" or "imitating" the styles of writing (p. 92).

When I asked Helen whether she had tried to use her native language (Mandarin) to enhance the production of good academic writing in English, she told me a fascinating and revealing story about the first English paper she ever wrote while still at university in China. She noted that the experience was "extremely painful" and caused her much "suffering". Helen remembered deciding that she would feel more secure and comfortable if she wrote the paper in Chinese first, and then translated it later into English. However, after she composed her paper in Chinese in a short time, she began to feel that the hardship and pain of translating



might have been worse than if she had begun the writing in English from the outset. As she was still far from confident about her English, she made a plan for her very own translation project. She decided to translate 30 Chinese sentences every day because to do any more was “too challenging and suffering” for her, and she needed to “deal with it bit by bit”. After she finally completed the translation project, maintaining her 30 sentences per day schedule, she realized that she needed someone to check her translation in writing her first paper. Her first choice of a reviewer was one of her colleagues who worked in the similar research area with hers. “Although I know she was in the same role as myself in terms of English proficiency, I was eager to receive some feedback from an outsider perspective.”

It turned out that most of her colleague’s feedback was related to grammatical errors, which was helpful to some extent. However, beyond her colleague’s feedback, Helen felt she was in need of more feedback from an international academic who was exposed to “real English”. So Helen sent her writing to her friend, who had travelled to the United Kingdom from China to complete her PhD. Helen said that she viewed the feedback from this second reviewer to be particularly “valuable, helpful and useful” because her “Chinese thought patterns” (中国式思维) had been “removed” from English writing and also her ‘Chinglish’ expressions were changed into some “standard” and “idiomatic” English expressions. After several rounds of checking and revising, Helen finally published that first paper. But from then on, she decided to write papers in English directly without going through an L1 to L2 translation process as this experience was too “struggling” and “painful”.

Helen came to Australia to pursue a PhD degree in an Australian university in 2008. She was strongly motivated to learn English as she believed that her English language proficiency and English writing capability would play a critical role in building her “international reputation” in her research field. It was an indication of her high motivation, self-discipline and passion for her research area, that she set herself the goal of completing one paper in English every two months. In order to fulfil this goal, she realized that she needed high academic English proficiency. Helen asserted that in Chinese she was able to clarify and organize her thoughts clearly and logically about her research. However, working as a PhD candidate in an Australian university now she felt she needed to use English to describe her new ideas and that brought particular challenges. She still felt acutely that her English language deficiencies hindered the flow of her thoughts in writing. In her interview with me, she explained that

if I could not describe my first idea in a clear way in my mind, my further thoughts would be totally messed up. If I could express my thoughts clearly, I will be able to explore and formulate my further ideas effectively. (Helen, interview 1, 10/5/2011)

Therefore, from her earliest months in Australia, Helen made every effort to improve her English language capability by extensively reading other papers published in her research field of data mining and wireless sensor networks. She believed that the first few papers she wrote in English while in Australia were rejected by the journals or the reviewers of the journals because of her low English language proficiency rather than any deficit in her research ideas or a lack of insight in her findings. In order to overcome this ‘deficiency’, she decided that she needed a broad “template” within which she could write all of her articles. Helen said that she identified a paper written in 2008 and judged ‘the best paper in that journal’ for that year, and used it as a sample of best practice, a kind of model or template for her future articles, in the hope that this would enhance her scholarly scientific writing in English.

Helen gave an example of how she learnt to write introductions to scientific papers in those early months:

I often read a sample introduction more than twenty times. I analyzed it sentence by sentence. I found that the author repeatedly talked about his contribution in different ways and from different angles. The author wrote about his achievement and contribution in the first three sentences, and then he detailed each sentence. In the following, he compared his results with others’ to show that his research data was better than others’. At the end of the introduction, he summarized his advantages and new findings again. He was just like a proficient sales person who was really good at advertising and promoting his products. (Helen, interview 1, 10/5/2011)

Careful analysis of others’ writing instructed and inspired Helen to write in English more “locally” and “professionally”. Keeping in mind the rules and conventions she learnt from that ‘2008’s best paper’, as well as other excellent papers, she “imitated” other academics’ writing styles by “picking up the good aspects of their writing” and “combining them and using them” in her writing. Helen reported that, paradoxically, this was how she developed her own style of English academic writing style. To Helen, English academic writing was like a traditional eight-part essay (八股文) in “old China”, which is fixed in terms of structure and writing style (Wu, 2000). Helen experienced a sense of psychological safety when using these fixed structures and writing conventions in her writing, and she felt even more justified in using these fixed structures and rules when she learned that her papers using these structures had been published. However, Helen also admitted that there was a risk if she just blindly copied

someone else's style or mechanically followed her selected "template". She learnt this from her previous English writing experiences, even when preparing for rather reductive versions of the English language such as in an IELTS test. She had completely copied the sample's structure in her English writing and realized that although her essays read very "neat", there were no "logics" or "cohesion" between sentences and paragraphs at all. Therefore, she needed to take more care to ensure what she termed "logical relations between sentences and paragraphs" when writing according to an apparently fixed template.

Helen and I spoke in our interviews about other ways of improving her English scholarly writing in Australia. She was appreciative of the seminars and workshops related to academic writing which her university organized for L2 researcher-writers. She explained that when she had been studying in China, she had never had chances to attend these kinds of workshops. Conventions and rules about grammar, structure, and language use in English academic writing benefited her English scholarly writing because she deeply believed that she needed to listen to and follow these "standards" in order to write better in English. As she noticed that her general English proficiency had improved gradually with time, Helen had noted and reflected on the specific strategies she could deploy in writing scientific academic papers in English.

## **6.2 How to write an English paper: "*One minute's brilliant performance on the stage is equal to ten years' practice under the stage*" (台上一分钟，台下十年功)**

The paper that Helen and I discussed in close detail was co-authored in 2008 by Helen and three other writers (One was her colleague and the other two listed authors were her supervisors). It was published in a highly ranked journal in her research field in 2011. Interestingly, although it was a co-authored paper, Helen told me that she was the person who actually worked out the main idea, conducted the experiment, and wrote up the paper. The other three persons offered support and suggestions about theory and experimental design. What is more, the data she drew on and analyzed for this paper were from a project whose research funding was awarded to her supervisors. Helen said that "without my supervisors' project, I could not have these data; also, without supporting ideas from my colleague and my supervisors, I could not conduct my experiment". Helen was happy with how they collaborated with each other in the processes of writing.

As stated earlier, from her earliest days of enrolment in her PhD, Helen had planned to write one academic paper every two months. As we talked about her writing of this 2008 paper, she said that she spent a very long time to prepare ideas and data before “that actual two months”:

I came up with the rough and initial idea two years ago. I know it was not good enough. But I believed that as long as I kept modifying and improving it, I could dig out (挖出) outstanding and creative data from this idea. I never expected I could reach the final destination in a straightforward way. I needed to move forward and backward. Sometimes I totally got lost. Sometimes I arrived at a dead end. In these cases, I needed to change direction. When I was very struggled and frustrated, I kept telling myself: ‘Do not give up’. (Helen, interview 2, 16/9/2011)

Helen reported she immersed herself in an iterative cycle of thinking, experimenting, reading, writing, comparing data with others’, and then thinking, reading, and writing some more. Once again, she emphasized the importance of comparing her work with that of other academics/researchers in her area by reading a large number of scientific journals and scholarly literature. She described as a “battle” the competition between herself and other “strong competitors” (i.e., academics) in their efforts to publish these articles in a prestigious conference or journal. If she suspected the results of a particular study or experiment were not that impressive, she experimented in the laboratory and in her writing in the hope of “beating” these other academics. Regarding the iterative process of reading, writing, comparing and experimenting, Helen spoke repeatedly of seeking “perfection” in her writing. She conceded that her drafting practices were incredibly complicated to the outsider, and probably to her too.

Helen reported that in her computer files, she still had more than 20 different drafts of this paper:

I believed that every copy was better than the previous one. However, due to time constraints, I needed to write some copies while my experiments were in progress. It meant that some of my data and findings were not ready when I was writing some drafts. In that case, some changes, either about ideas or about the experiment, might occur. I often had to delete something or add in something [later on]. But I never completely deleted what I did not need for this paper. I set up a file named ‘trash’ for this paper. I put all the deleted ideas into this file because I thought I might need them in my future writing. (Helen, interview 1, 10/5/2011)

Helen’s story here provides quite a vivid reflection of Zamel’s (1983) understanding of composing which can be characterised as a “non-linear, exploratory, and generative process where writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning” (p. 165).

As well as the important role that reading played in generating ideas during Helen's writing processes, she also felt it provided a means for acquiring linguistic knowledge. Helen likened this process to "Caifeng" (采风), the ancient Chinese custom where artists collect folksongs. Like these artists, Helen said she collected and memorized terminology, idiomatic expressions, useful sentence structures and language styles by reading others' papers at this stage. Helen claimed that she preferred to have all linguistic possibilities at hand before writing the first draft because it meant that she did not need to worry too greatly about linguistic aspects in her writing. However, she did admit that this was the "ideal" situation, and often she found that she still needed to continue to learn and acquire linguistic knowledge and to polish her language. Doecke and Parr (2005) refer to this as ongoing "grappling with language" (p. 9), a fundamental part of the process of seeking to make meaning and to communicate meaning clearly for one's readers.

In the course of generating the 20 drafts of that paper, Helen said she frequently re-read and reviewed sections of what she had written before in order to review and revise the accuracy of language and contents of a particular draft. Helen mentioned that typically she did not allow others to read her writing until she was personally pleased with what she had written after a few rounds of self-checking. She mainly used two "self-mediated strateg[ies]" (Kang & Pyun, 2012, p. 59) in the self-checking processes. She worked out a checklist in line with the particular requirements of the journal in which she hoped to publish her article. The criteria in the checklist were individualized to a particular journal. Helen explained two examples of criteria (or items in her checklist) that she set up for this paper:

One criterion for this written paper was to exclude anything which might indicate I was unconfident about what I was writing. In order to do so, I had to make sure my positive perspectives were emphasized. And the negative perspectives were eliminated as much as possible. Actually when I was writing this paper, I knew it was not perfect. As I did not have enough time to work them out, and clarify each unclear point, I tried to water down or even hide them. Another example was about the consistency of using some particular terms. I used the tool of 'Find' in the Word to ensure I used the same terminology to refer to the same thing. (Helen, interview 1, 10/5/2011)

Helen found that making PowerPoint slides of a draft paper she had written and then practicing an oral presentation was a very good revising strategy for her writing. It helped her clarify her key ideas and processes. Helen saw herself as an introverted person, and she suggested that this was one reason why she was not comfortable with talking about her writing with her

colleagues or friends. However, Helen also knew that feedback from readers was always very important. When she practiced her oral presentation with PowerPoint slides, she tended to imagine she was communicating with a particular audience:

I have to present what I have written in a concise and clear way, and then my audience can understand my writing. I feel that every time after I complete my PowerPoint slides, I am more aware of the unclear points in my paper because I continuously ask and answer my own questions. In order to observe my text from a reader's perspective, I audio record my practice of the presentation, and then play and listen to it again and again until all of my thoughts and ideas are clarified and organized appropriately and accurately. (Helen, interview 1, 10/5/2011)

Helen reported that she was good at (and enjoyed) asking and answering questions arising from her writing. I have referred in the Literature Review Chapter 2 to this kind of posing and answering one's own questions as inner dialogue or 'private speech' (Vygotsky, 1978). Helen believed this was a genuine benefit to her writing practices.

Although in our interviews Helen kept insisting that she was an introverted person who liked working individually, she nevertheless repeatedly spoke of seeking support from the language assistance programs in Focus University and from her supervisors after she had completed several rounds of self-checking. Helen reported that she frequently made appointments with teachers in the Learning Support Centre in her university, who offered free language support to international students aiming to improve their academic writing capability. Their support tended to be in correcting her grammar errors as well as refining awkward phrasing or syntax, including inaccurate wording, colloquial sentence structures and non-standard forms of words. More importantly, they used and provided a lot of language support resources, such as various professional dictionaries, to explain these errors so that it was a beneficial learning process for Helen. Gradually, she had become more conscious of the errors she was making as the writing became more refined. However, as these language support people were not in a position to make any change related to her particular field of expertise, she also resorted to her supervisors to review the specialist contents, academic discourses and ideas in her writing:

I always look forward to my supervisor's comments. Actually, I am excited about my supervisor's negative feedback because I am better aware of my problems when we disagree about them. You know when my paper is published, there will be thousands of readers who read and question it. The more arguments I can have with my supervisor, the fewer disputes I will have with my audience. (Helen, interview 1, 10/5/2011)

When I further asked about any other kind of dialogic activity Helen was involved in during the writing of her 2008 paper, she thought quietly for a while and then stated that the feedback from the panel of the journal/conference was also very valuable but also very “costly”. It meant that when a paper was not initially approved, the journal’s reviewers gave her some feedback which she could use to make further revisions. Helen regarded reviewers of journal manuscripts as “noted professional figures” in her area. Therefore, constructive comments and suggestions they gave to her when they initially rejected an earlier version of a paper played a crucial role in improving the overall quality of her paper. Interestingly, Helen asserted that their critique of her writing was always “dead on the target” (一针见血). “Although their negative feedback sometimes is a huge blow to me and I have to pay a big price for it, I benefit from it in many ways in terms of language and content”, she said.

### **6.3 Negotiating identity: “*Culture has nothing to do with academic writing*”**

In my first interview with Helen, she described herself as an “enthusiastic” Chinese culture lover despite having lived for many years in Australia. However, she believed her strong sense of connectedness to and passion for Chinese culture should not come through in her English academic writing because, as she said, “Cultural identity has nothing to do with my English scholarly writing”. Chinese people, in her opinion, seemed to be too modest, which had exerted a negative impact on the quality of their English academic writing:

I think neither our creativity capability nor academic skills are lower than those of native English writers. However, native English researchers are better at ‘selling’ their ideas in their written/research products, because they are better at English language. When I analyzed the top paper published in my area, I found that the author used various expressions or words to address his achievement over and over again. Chinese people are very reluctant to do so because we believe that ‘modesty makes people improve’ (谦虚让人进步). We might mention the advantages of our research results but we do not tend to put much emphasis on it. (Helen, interview 2, 16/9/2011)

Comparing Chinese academic writing she had done in China with the English paper she used as a sample, Helen found that “Chinese writers tend to prefer implicitness and obscurity [indirectness]”. One example was related to the use of diagrams/tables in writing. Helen said English academic writing required the author to explain the diagram in a very specific way, including every step in the diagram, while Chinese academics tended to explain the diagram as simply as possible in prose and leave readers to make sense of it by themselves.

When I asked about how Helen dealt with these differences, she reported that the way she dealt with such conflicts in writing styles and cultural conventions was very simple. She felt that even though Chinese students writing in Australian or international academic settings may have experienced different thought patterns, discourse traditions and educational ideologies, Helen tried her best to “hide” and “correct” any rhetorical style influenced by “Chinese cultural thought patterns” in her English academic writing (Nisbette, Peng, Choi & Norenzayan, 2001; see also Li, 2007). Her interest in learning about differences in cultural rhetorical styles was in order that she could emulate and follow the “right” and “standard” style which diverged from her native culture in her English writing:

I remember when I learnt Chinese in high school in China, most of the texts we learnt used a step-by-step lead-up to the topic. One of the common questions we practiced at that time was to find out or summarize the topic sentence in one paragraph. That is Chinese writers’ logic. Chinese writers tend to take a long while to get to the main point. Sometimes they even hide the topic sentence in their writing. But, native English writers write in a completely different way. I am learning from them now. I write up the topic sentence directly at the beginning of each paragraph. In order to highlight the topic sentence, I make sure all other sentences in this paragraph are closely related to the topic sentence. When I do the revision, I always keep it in mind. I remove the irrelevant sentences or move them to other paragraphs. (Helen, interview 2, 16/9/2011)

She attributed the strategy she used to cope with conflicts in the rhetorical style to her consideration of potential readers. Although not all of potential readers would be native English speakers, Helen believed that she had to cater for the “needs” of the majority of English speaking academic readers by following “western academic standards”. In order to satisfy most of her readers who are native English speakers to achieve her academic success, she did not mind discarding her native-cultural rhetorical styles in her English written products. She was quite happy to fit into the role of what Ivanič (1994) calls a puppet on the string of “the values and practices of the social context” (p. 11).

Helen admitted that the process of “fitting” into the western academic context was frustrating, complicated and an ongoing struggle. Although she had accumulated a large volume of specialised scientific vocabulary as she prepared for the Graduate Record Examination (a standardized test that is an admissions requirement for most graduate schools in the United States) before, and since then she had greatly improved her grammar skills, she still often struggled with writing “in a locally standard way”. She admired these local western people as they could describe something accurately by a very simple combination of words. She went so



far as to say she felt sorry that she was not born and raised in an English-speaking country. With that background, she believed she would have been better able to distinguish subtle differences between words with similar meanings. The example Helen used to explain was the use of “over” and “under” in sentences:

I learnt from movies that I could say ‘I am over you’ which means I do not care about you; and ‘I am under you’ has the opposite meaning. Look, ‘over’ and ‘under’ are antithetical to each other. How interesting that is! It is simple and accurate. We have learnt the words ‘over’ and ‘under’ but I have never known I could use these words in this way because from our English education, we only learnt the basic and textbook-based use of English vocabularies. (Helen, interview 1, 10/5/2011)

Helen had very similar experiences with the use of language when writing in academic English. Her supervisor required her to use “plain” and “concise” English language in her paper writing to enhance readers’ understanding. It was a great challenge for her again. Helen was confident about her English capability when describing or explaining something to her readers. However, due to lack of knowledge about some “hidden” and “local” meanings of vocabulary, she said that she was not able to do it using “plain and concise” language. As I further explored the strategies she used to overcome this problem, she addressed the importance of “reading and imitating others’ works” again. She reported that when she read others’ papers, she was keenly aware of learning and memorizing some “interesting”, “accurate” and “fresh” expressions others used. Sometimes she tended to leave it for a while as the next day she might come up with a better word or phrase. In the cycle of reading, reflecting, revising and re-writing, she was usually able to finally work out the most appropriate expression to make clear sense for her readers.

Besides the choice/use of vocabulary, I also asked Helen about the strategies she used to determine the optimal length of sentences in her paper writing. She reported a very interesting strategy which she learnt from a teacher in the Learning Support Centre of Focus University. She said that she tended to use longer and more complicated sentence structures to describe simple ideas while using short and simple sentence structures to describe something professional and complicated. Helen was very fond of this strategy because she firmly believed that it “helped her readers’ understanding” of her writing at the same time as it made her writing more “professional”. She further explained the use of a combination of long and short sentences in her writing:

For example, I use more simple expressions and short sentences in the abstract. It is for a wide range of readers. Some of them might not be in my area, so I have to

simplify my language to help their understanding. In the body part [of the article], if I talk about something easy to understand, I tend to use more complicated sentences as I do not want the reviewers or my readers to feel anything in my research shallow and simple. (Helen, interview 2, 16/9/2011)

At the end of the second interview, Helen asserted that she became more and more confident about English scholarly writing due to the strategies she learnt and acquired from different sources. Although she loved Chinese, she did not think she needed to “do anything in my English writing to let readers know I am Chinese”. For her, the most significant goal was to be “a more productive professional researcher” with a growing number of papers published.

## Chapter 7 Ada's Narrative

Ada, aged in her early 30's, was a fourth year PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education in Urban University. When I interviewed her for the second time, she had already submitted her PhD thesis and started with working on the feedback she had received from her examiners. Ada's research focus was about the use of online technology in Chinese students' English study in Australia. Her accounts of her own English study in general and developing her academic writing in English in particular are replete with complicated emotions – disappointment, excitement, frustration, and satisfaction. Ada's narrative combines interesting insights into her developing writing alongside contradictory descriptions, especially when she reflected on the identity work she engaged in as an ESL writer undertaking academic writing. For instance, in her interviews with me, Ada was eager to highlight her distinctive cultural identity as a Chinese young woman; she resisted being “brainwashed” by western cultural practices. However, she also advocated the importance of “accepting” English-speaking countries' writing norms and conventions and “hiding” her Chinese background behind her western writing style.

### **7.1 Changeable emotions associated with English writing: “*There is a glass wall between real English and me*”**

Ada was introduced to English when she entered junior high school in China, where it was a compulsory subject. Although Ada believed that she had some talent in English learning – she seemed to be able to learn the language quickly – she actually disliked English. Her teachers and her peers in the English classroom had very limited access to English learning resources and materials. Adopting an exam-oriented pedagogy, her English teachers mainly relied on mechanical drills of grammatical patterns, in a manner reminiscent of grammar-oriented approaches (Paulson, 1970). Her teacher regularly required Ada and her peers to write short essays in 150-200 words. In these ‘essays’, rather than creating her own structure and writing about her ideas and thoughts in the content, she needed to use the ‘outline’ her teacher gave to students and she was required to answer specific questions the teacher listed for each writing topic. The teachers' feedback about her essays mainly focused on the correct use of grammar and vocabulary, with little attention to style in the ideas she was writing about. Although Ada mentioned a few times about her disinclination to study English, she formed her own way of learning English which greatly benefited her confidence in learning English and in her future

English writing. Rather than totally relying on the teacher, Ada reported that she used the International Phonetic Alphabet symbols by which she learnt the pronunciation to build her vocabulary herself and she also went to bookshops to select some grammar books to reinforce her grammar skills. Ada regarded her English study practices in her secondary school as helpful in some ways:

When I look back to what I have done in the secondary school, although I attach too much negative emotion to it, I am still thankful to it. Grammar and vocabulary I gained at that time help me build up the foundation of English language study. It allowed me to build up a house on it in my future study and career. (Ada, interview 1, 20/5/2011)

On graduating from her junior high school as a 17-year-old girl, Ada entered a renowned university in Shandong Province in China hoping to specialize in English Education. She reported that she did not have any particular struggle with adjusting to university life and she never worried about the competitive atmosphere that was such a feature of conversations with her peers. She recalled with some embarrassment that many of her classmates even called her “genius girl” due to her outstanding academic results for all subjects. However, she claimed that she “hated” English even more at that time than she had at school, largely because of her English teacher’s “ineffective” pedagogy and what she described as the teacher’s “unpleasant” professional qualities. One thing that she did learn from this experience was that a qualified English language teacher was supposed to play an important role in motivating her students and providing a role model for those students in how to learn English. However, her motivation for learning English was greatly decreased due to what she perceived as her teacher’s “terrible English pronunciation”. Another aspect of the teaching and learning that bothered her was that the teacher used Chinese language to teach English for most of the class time. Sometimes when Ada or her peers tried to answer questions in English, the teacher occasionally asked them to “interpret” their answer in Chinese. Ada was very discouraged at that time. And this kind of emotion negatively affected her motivation to learn and to write English. Ada’s negative feelings about her English study experiences from this time in her life are consistent with accounts in the literature about traditional grammar-oriented drills-and-skills teaching approaches in China, which tend to be highly inflexible, dogmatic, and monologic (Dannessi, 2003; Hyland, 2003).

Unfortunately, no matter how much Ada disliked English study at that time, she could not exclude English study from her life as she had to take the most important national English language exams in China, CET-4 (College English Test, which is mandatory for university

students in China who are not English majors) and CET-6. Ada applied herself intensively for a short time in order to prepare for these vital tests. She still remembered that the study resource she mainly adopted was *New Concept English 3* (which was, she explained, not a textbook as we might understand that term). In working with *New Concept English 3*, she memorized text formats, sentences structures and commonly used phrases in the texts in that book. Ada admitted that she paid very little attention to ideas or logic in her essay writing at that time, as the criteria in the exams were mainly about the correct use of grammar and a wide range of vocabulary.

After successfully completing her bachelor's degree in English Education, which qualified her to teach English language in China, Ada went to Belgium to pursue the Master of Education in 2005. Ada regarded this overseas study experience as being "more interesting" than her earlier university experience. She felt that she had obtained "a sense of accomplishment" from her time in Belgium. Studying in a non-English speaking country, her lecturers and supervisors seldom criticised her English language proficiency. Ada became more and more confident as she produced more and more written work in English in her field. She prided herself on helping others through checking and correcting English errors in their assignments. During this year, she said, "I was a happy and productive English writer". However, although Ada had received very good feedback on her English written work at that time, she now looked back on the quality of the writing that she had produced and she was not impressed:

I think I followed a Chinese style of English writing. You know, Chinese writing is more likely to be readers' responsibility-based. It means that when writers intend to express or describe something, they do not need to write directly and clearly. The responsibility of the writer is to imply and guide. Readers need to work out the specific meanings by themselves. Otherwise, the readers might say the writer is too idiotic to write simple things so precisely. In my English writing, I tried to give readers some implications rather than pointing out my meanings straightaway. (Ada, interview 1, 20/05/2011)

Ada attributed her earliest English writing style to the influence of her Chinese writing habits, developed over her childhood years. She revealed that Chinese was her favourite subject when she was in the secondary school. Because of this love of her home language, she read a lot in Chinese and she believed that she was accomplished in writing different genres of Chinese writing. Throughout these years, in any writing in English she did, she kept reminding herself of the differences between English and Chinese writing, and yet she often allowed her Chinese

writing styles and practices to seep into her English writing unconsciously. For example, she claimed that she preferred to use long sentences and clauses in her English writing:

It is very hard for me to write short sentences in Chinese. I believe the use of long and complicated sentence structures could somewhat show the writer's good writing capability. Sometimes Chinese people think 'the harder an article reads, the higher level the writer achieves'. (Ada, interview 1, 20/05/2011)

Ada did not realize that her English writing style had been "problematic" until she came to Australia to pursue her PhD degree in Education Faculty in Urban University in Australia in 2007. She was shocked and extremely disappointed when she received feedback from her PhD supervisor on her first written work, where she had offered some general thoughts and reflections on some reading that her supervisor had set her to read:

I lost all of my confidence. My supervisor had used the WORD correcting tool to do the correction for my writing. I remember the whole article looked red. I felt...Oh my God...so frustrated. I could not believe it. You know in Belgium, I could write in English quickly. After I finished my own assignments, I was even able to help others write theirs. Nobody told me about faults in my English writing. (Ada, interview 1, 20/05/2011)

Although Ada's confidence had taken a few knocks due to her supervisor's critical feedback on her writing, she expressed her deep appreciation to her supervisor many times in our interviews. She frequently characterized her supervisor as a significant and influential person in her personal and academic growth: "Without her encouragement, I don't think I could have completed my thesis". Interestingly, Ada came to devise her own ways of interpreting her supervisor's overall feedback. "My supervisor is a very nice and positive person. If she says 'your writing is fantastic...marvelous', it means that my writing is fine; if she says 'your writing is good...', it says that my writing is just so so". Even so, Ada admitted that what she described as her supervisor's 'positive way' of offering negative feedback, to a large extent, dispelled her negative emotions and despondency about her English writing at that time.

As I say, when I conducted interviews with Ada, she was in the fourth year of her PhD candidature. I asked her whether she became less frustrated as her English language proficiency was supposed to be improving all the time, now that she was approaching the end of her PhD. She reported another problem in terms of the use of English she was confronted with – having higher aspirations but lower abilities (眼高手低). She felt that although her writing ability in English had greatly improved, her own expectations for her English language capability grew even more.

Keeping in mind the importance of accuracy and logic in English academic writing, Ada reported that her Chinese way of thinking often affected the efficiency of her expression in English writing. Also, she realized that in fact her vocabulary and expression were not adequate for her to express in her English writing all that she wanted to say, and in the way she wanted to say it.

When I come up with a new concept or idea in my mind, I firstly develop it in Chinese. But I am not always able to 100% accurately and precisely express it in English. For example, I like using Chinese idioms in my Chinese writing because I feel that the use of concise and simple idioms allows me to express accurately and vividly. I have them at my fingertips and can pick up them easily and use them aptly. However, in English writing, I have to turn my ideas which were initially created in Chinese words into a long and boring translation. Even so, I still have to shrink my ideas to 50% of the original because sometimes I feel that I can sense some subtle things, but I cannot find suitable language to write them out (只可意会不可言传). Therefore, I have to compromise or give up. (Ada, interview 2, 28/07/2011)

Often in our interviews, the conversation circled back to Ada's experiences in working with her PhD supervisor at Urban University. With each new piece of written feedback she received from her supervisor, along with all of the corrections of her English writing, she would become very upset and downhearted. Her supervisor would comfort her, saying that "Do not worry. They are small things. I correct them when I read it." However, while appreciating her supervisor's detailed corrections, Ada described her emotional and intellectual attitude to writing in English using a metaphor that I found particularly evocative. She said she felt that "there is a glass wall between real English and me. Although English seems to be so close to me, I can never access the real English world".

In our interviews, we also discussed the strategies that Ada employed to overcome the problems with accuracy of expression and the other challenges she encountered in her efforts to produce academic writing that was she herself might be happy with. For example, she often turned to some local Australian peers or friends to read and check the clarity of her writing. Also, Ada talked about the value of various online Chinese-English dictionaries she used in her writing. Another helpful strategy was about the use of Google Translator, but not using it in a mechanistic uncritical way. Ada explained that she typically tried to type the English words *as well as* Chinese translations into Google Translator, and from what the software churned out she would draw out a range of synonyms or grammatical structures which she could experiment with in her writing. Needless to say, she could never guarantee the accuracy of Google Translator's suggested translations. She was well aware that this crude software was

incapable of taking into account the social and cultural contexts or nuances of meaning making in her writing when it proposed translation options. However, Ada believed that by presenting her with more linguistic options, and through her critical approach to closely examining the appropriateness of these options, it was more likely to assist her in her struggle to work out the best way of expression.

## **7.2 Multiple voices involved in English writing: “*I accept differences, but I resist being brainwashed*”**

Ada believed that her writing processes was “very messy” because she was seemingly always involved in an ongoing process of searching, reading, writing and revising. At the time of our interviews, she was preoccupied with her doctoral thesis writing, which was about what she framed as a social phenomenon and social practices for meaning making – *the combination of internet technology with literacy education*. She was always looking for “evidence” when reading other academics’ research reports. Since she believed that professional writers “should provide enough evidence for everything they put in the writing”, Ada claimed that “the more you read, the more you could get the supporting evidence, and then the more persuasive your writing will be”. Moreover, Ada reported that she needed to “actively *negotiate* with the voices in the literature” by comparing the differences between others’ findings and hers and working out the strengths of her research and the areas she needed to develop further. In this way, she was able to set up her own ‘database’ of literature in her field of study. It seemed that Ada greatly benefited from this kind of dialogical reading in terms of idea generation and research data analysis (Carrington, 2007). Ada claimed that she started to tease out an analytical framework that would help her to write about her topic after what she described as the “first round” of reading of the literature. At that time, she listed all key points under each of a number of themes, and she did this either in Chinese or English. Sometimes, she said, she preferred to do this writing in Chinese because she felt the use of her native language help her to “clarify her thoughts”.

After Ada built up the “framework” for her writing, she fleshed this out by adding more details into each part. At the same time, she had already begun her “second round” of reading, putting more emphasis on the particular scholarly language, expressions, logic, and structure that authors used in the literature she found most interesting:



I need to learn how authors express themselves, like some patterns of expression. You know there are some commonly used sentence structures and terminologies. They could help develop my writing. I also need to learn their logic strategies. It is about how to present my data in a professional and logical way. I kept reading until I finish the first draft [of my literature review]. (Ada, interview 1, 20/05/2011)

Ada reported that, rather than writing a full draft and then going back and beginning to edit and re-draft, she was constantly conducting revisions during the drafting processes. “Keeping reviewing my writing back and forth helped but it was also a kind of torture.” She said this with no hint of smile or irony. “But if I had not gone through these suffering processes, I would have never improved my writing”.

Ada reflected that doing PhD research was a relatively “lonely” commitment, and her supervisor was the person with whom she had most communication. Interestingly, her ongoing struggle with meaning making through engaging with the written and oral feedback on her written work from her supervisor allowed her to better connect with and negotiate with other “voices” in her PhD journey. As a PhD student, Ada admitted that she could not simply accept all the changes her supervisor had proposed “at the click of a mouse”. She tended to “read her supervisor’s feedback slowly and carefully from the beginning to the end”, and at the same time she tried to understand the reasons for the errors or awkward phrasing. She found that her supervisor could sometimes use very simple language to accurately express what she had attempted to write in convoluted or complex language. She felt very “headachy” if her supervisor just put a symbol to indicate her unclear writing. The even worse situation was when her supervisor marked a whole paragraph as needing to be re-written. “It was horrible. I would be very confused and wondered whether she did not get my meaning or she did not understand my wording”. In these cases, Ada preferred to follow up with face to face conversations with her supervisor in which she would attempt to “clarify her thoughts” and “polish the language”. When I asked whether she had challenged or questioned her supervisor’s corrections, she said:

Actually I am a very critical person, and I am not easily convinced by others. But I am reluctant to challenge my supervisor because I respect...and admire her and embarrassing her is the last thing I want to do. Also, she is my supervisor...the authority...the expert, I want to trust her and believe she is right. (Ada, interview 2, 28/07/2011)

In very rare cases, Ada had to argue with her supervisor with regard to her research project or English writing. She hoped that she had done this “in a humble and polite way”. She said that she would sometimes generate an additional written report in which she would explain to her

supervisor why she wanted to insist on what she was doing. She came to feel that such written explanations made her supervisor feel more comfortable to accept her arguments. After four years' working with her supervisor, Ada reflected that she had built up her own way to negotiate with her supervisor's comments and thoughts.

Up to now, I have focused on the language of respect and authority that Ada used to describe her relationship with her supervisor. However, there were also times in our interviews when she said that she looked upon her supervisor as "mum" – a mother figure, someone who offered much emotional support that she (Ada) felt was invaluable in her PhD thesis writing. "My supervisor is so patient, responsible and knowledgeable that she cheers me up and gives me strength to keep going on my journey of research". She liked reporting her writing progress to her supervisor either by email or by face-to-face talking, as her supervisor could give her some "reassurance" or a "push" to her thesis writing:

I am always very ambitious when I make a plan [to write]. But I am also easily distracted by people or things happening around me, which affects my research progress. But when I realize the day that I need to meet up with my supervisor is coming, I work faster and more efficiently. (Ada, interview 2, 28/07/2011)

In our interviews, Ada admitted that although she benefited from being able to engage in a kind of robust debate with her supervisor, she could not put herself into an equal position when discussing with her supervisor. Rather, she felt more "relaxed" and "equal" in the interaction with her peers or friends regarding her research writing. She described communicating with her colleagues as "an indispensable activity". That interaction with others not only helped her clarify her thinking but also made the writing processes more interesting and engaging. Ada mentioned that when she had commenced her PhD research four years earlier, she tended to be more "humble". She took every opportunity to get to know more friends or colleagues in her research field and to chat with them whenever she could. As a novice researcher, she was not confident about what she was doing and she needed advice from others wherever she could get it. Ada talked about one colleague who generously offered her many helpful suggestions regarding her research. She characterized her dialogue with this colleague as "not a real interactive communication .... More like a way of teaching." Therefore, at the early stage, she regarded the academic communication as "a way of seeking help":

I know it is important to talk with others when I come up with an issue about my research. But I never go to ask for help from my colleagues or friends straightaway. Rather, I would do some reading and thinking on the issue firstly...read others' opinions...build up my own database [thoughts]...Then I go to talk about it with my

colleagues. I show my database...like other researchers' solutions, why this one is good...why that one is bad. In this way, I believe my colleagues and friends would be happy because they see I do spend some time on the issue by myself. I did not come for help without doing anything. This is my way of showing respect and sincerity. (Ada, interview 2, 28/07/2011)

Gradually, Ada became more experienced in her research field and she started to be more confident when communicating with others. When we discussed the issue of communication with peers, colleagues and friends, our conversation often veered away from a focus on developing writing skills, as such, toward nurturing and building relationships with others, which she found so crucial in her PhD research journey. When I asked whether Ada had experienced any conflict and perhaps argued with others in communication, she claimed that it was very “personal-based” and “situational-based”. She tended to “trust” her colleagues first, and she was more likely to “try out” their suggestions in her own time before rejecting them. In some cases, when the issue was intimately concerned with her background or expertise, she admitted that she could be more “stubborn”. For example, Ada and one of her Australian peers had argued about the unequal distribution of education resources to minority groups in China. Although her colleague held completely different opinions from her, she never gave in. Rather, Ada said she wanted to “figure out the reason for the differences in our ideas. In this way, I was able to confirm my original thinking”. When I further asked about “being critical” in communication, she claimed that

I believe that a critical person should sometimes accept others' ideas. In Chinese, we call it “Na Lai Zhu Yi (拿来主义)”, which means that we need to absorb the right and good things. But when I have become stronger in my research, I am more confident to express my views and also I prefer to insist on my standpoints. I accept the differences, but I resist being brain-washed. (Ada, interview 2, 28/07/2011)

In this section I have shown how Ada tended to defer to her supervisor's expertise and comments on the “linguistic or literal aspects”. But her relationship with her supervisor was a complex one, indeed. Through a fascinatingly complex interplay of contradictory emotions, attitudes and intellectual responses to her supervisor's written feedback and face to face meetings, she recognized that both her English writing capability and her abilities as an academic improved through her interactions with her. Her relationship with her PhD supervisor was immensely an important factor in her successful PhD journey, as was her relationship with her peers, colleagues and friends. However, her ongoing relationships with all these people involved a complex dialogic negotiation.

### 7.3 Negotiating identity: *“I am writing in a locked box”*

The final theme I’d like to address is concerned with Ada’s researcher-writer identity work in her English scholarly writing. Ada admitted that she could not enjoy English writing as much as she did with Chinese writing as she felt that she had limited freedom in English writing in terms of the use of language and the management of contents. Ada reported several problems she encountered in her English writing. The first one arose from her English proficiency. She said that her English language ability sometimes “restricted” her, or even “distorted” what she wanted to express. It is worth quoting her thinking about this at some length:

I do not feel comfortable to always use the rigid structure and expressions in my English writing as I cannot follow my heart in English writing. I like using long sentences as they allow me to put lots of details and description in a sentence. But my supervisor and colleagues always change them into short sentences. Sometimes I prefer to use some fresh words in my English writing because I want my writing to be different from others’. But when I show my writing to my native English-speaking peers, they said “it is wrong here”. I could not tell the nuance of synonyms. Also, when arranging my contents, I have to consider English speakers’ ways of thinking. For example, Chinese people like to make compliments before criticism – Yu Yang Xian Yi (欲扬先抑). Another example is that Chinese writers like to introduce the background of the research rather than the research data in the introduction of the paper. However, I have to carefully get rid of all these cultural-oriented ways of writing in my English writing. But I have become used to writing in this way, and I have written in this way for many years in my home country. I feel that I am writing in a locked box. I cannot write freely. (Ada, interview 2, 28/07/2011)

When I asked Ada whether she tried to break out of this “locked box”, she expressed regretfully that she did try a few times but failed in the end due to the pressure from “professional persons” around her, such as her supervisor and English-speaking peers who read her writing. For example, sometimes her supervisor could not understand her English writing, although she thought her supervisor had a strong sense of her Chinese style of English writing. However, she still pushed Ada to change it because she thought it hindered readers’ understanding. Ada claimed that gradually she tended to “do as the Romans do when in Rome”. It was more reasonable as it saved readers’ time. For example, by putting the research findings or results in the introduction of a paper, readers were able to decide whether the written paper was what they expected after reading the introduction. Also, with time Ada tended to accept and follow some Australian writing norms and conventions because “it makes my [her] life easier”. As a non-native English-speaking researcher, Ada noticed that her writing needed to be consistent with English speaking writers’ rather than “swimming against the tide”. Considering most of her potential readers are native English speakers, she said that she had the responsibility to

ensure they could understand her writing clearly. Also, she needed to acculturate herself into the western discourse community. She needed to “graduate, do some publications and later start her career in this English-speaking country”. She wanted to get involved in this society better. Therefore, she should “learn” the norms in this society and “change” herself to “follow” the native English speakers’ writing rules.

At the same time, Ada asserted that she was sensitive to the differences in writing styles between English writing and Chinese writing, and she was cautious about the risk of “Chinglish” in her writing. At this point in our initial conversations, when I asked her about the likelihood of her ‘losing’ her Chinese cultural identity, she paused for a moment... Collecting her thoughts, she answered that the writing context and potential readers in Australia urged her to “make writing sound more like a native’s” and to some extent give up her unique ‘Chinese style’ of English writing. She was prepared to do this, and to “hide” her own cultural identity from the language perspective when these two kinds of writing styles were contradictory. In saying this, it appeared that Ada had “entered into” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 6) the English-speaking country’s culture and achieved the first step, which Bakhtin terms “empathy”.

However, as Bakhtin said, one cannot realize the creative understanding of another’s culture by simple ‘empathy’. Ada mentioned that she had her own way of establishing her national and cultural identity in English academic writing. In her opinion, the better way of showing her national identity was through the ‘content’ rather than the ‘language style’ she used in her writing. “I am glad if my readers know I am Chinese because of the content I write rather than the way I use the English language in my writing”. Therefore, when the writing topic was concerned with some critical cultural or political issues, she had a strong desire to highlight her Chinese identity. Ada reported that her PhD research topic was about critical literacy with a political focus. Her nationalistic emotions (爱国情怀) involved in her thesis writing were strongly criticized by one of her examiners. According to the examiner, Ada appeared to be too anxious to defend China when talking about the political issues in China in her thesis. He believed that “this prevented Ada’s research from reaching a higher academic and professional level”. I asked Ada about her viewpoints on the feedback regarding her ‘nationalistic emotions’ in her thesis. Ada said that

When I re-read my thesis, I found that I was a little bit emotional when talking about China. Although I did not intend to defend China, I showed my personal feelings from my choice of words and manner of expressions. I know as a researcher, I need to be

objective. But I am a human being rather than a Lord. I could not completely stand back to be an outsider because I am always a part of it. What I can do is to make a balance. I need to let my thesis pass so I could not just ignore his comments and feedback. I revised my thesis while trying maintaining my standpoints. I corrected words which were integrated with strong nationalistic emotions. I used the first-hand original data. For example, I incited a news report which had the biased report of China by some western media. I had to find out and use the original news report excerpt rather than the citations from others' work. In this way, I tried to hide my national emotions and be more objective. (Ada, interview 2, 28/07/2011)

Ada reported that the main lesson she learnt from this experience was that she needed “culturally-grounded nationalism” rather “political nationalism” in her thesis. She tried to separate political emotions from her scholarly writing. At the same time, she wanted to maintain and show her Chinese cultural identity from “what she wrote (that is the content)” rather than ‘how she wrote (that is, the language)’. Ada believed that she could gradually reconcile and negotiate the cultural differences in a more sensible and scholarly way after she completed her PhD thesis.

## Chapter 8 Shane's Narrative

Shane, in his late twenties, started his Master's degree by research in an Australia university in 2009, majoring in Electrical and Electronics Engineering. In a series of two extended interviews (a total of 150 minutes of interview time), he explained to me that he completed his undergraduate study in one of China's top three universities majoring in Information Technology. He also went to a university in Hong Kong for one year as an exchange student. Shane told me he had learnt English in different places and under different English education systems, which had provided him with rich experiences of learning to write in English as a second language. Shane was keen on learning and understanding the differences between Chinese writing and English writing. He drew particular attention to the tensions, negotiations and confusions in the process of constructing and interweaving his research-writer identity in his English scholarly writing.

### 8.1 Learning to write in English: *“My teacher did not allow me to be a creative writer”*

Like most Chinese students in the early 1990s, Shane's early exposure to English was through the English classes he attended during secondary school in his hometown – a small seaside city in Shandong Province. Even though Shane had always been enthusiastic about studying English, looking back on his time in secondary school, he expressed great disappointment in English education policy in China at that time because, in his view, it was too much exam-oriented and did not offer students space and freedom to become a creative learner and writer, which he always aspired to be. Early in the first interview, he told a story that happened to him relating to English writing when he was in Year 10 in China.

His English teacher asked the class to write an imaginative essay based on some comics given in the test. Shane was so excited. He thought he finally had a chance to write with some freedom as it was an “imaginative” writing. In order to work out an interesting and creative written piece, he interpreted the comics using his imagination, which he felt made his writing more complicated and different from others'. However, the teacher gave him a very low mark for his piece of writing, and warned him that he had to follow the standards of English exams which were concerned with “simple content, fixed essay format and fancy and correct language”. He

was encouraged to “write complex sentences” and “use big words” rather than “focusing on the content”. Clearly, the impact that the low grade had on Shane was great. From then on, Shane admitted that he had stopped trying to be creative in his writing in ‘school English’ as he thought he was not strong enough to challenge the English education system enacted in China at the time. Nevertheless, he was confident about his talent in English because he found that as long as he followed the rules, which ensured that his writing included correct grammar, complicated vocabulary, and long sentences with the use of different clauses, he achieved outstanding results in his English tests.

Shane entered one of the top three Chinese universities in 2003, with a score of 93% for the English subject in the College Entrance Examination. He was happy to have more free time at University. One of the ways he filled in this spare time was to write blog posts in Chinese. When I asked about his writing style in these Chinese language blog posts, he told me that he always tried to write in a creative way. He was able to “play with the language” by using lots of “juicy” and popular words and diverse rhetorical methods, such as metaphor and puns, to make his writing more interesting and fresh. He wanted his readers to regard him as a humorous writer with a “colourful” character. At the same time, he also tried to share his individual experiences and feelings by writing them down in English. However, he felt that he did not get the same sense of enjoyment and freedom from English writing. Influenced by the past English learning experience, his anxiety about grammatical correctness and linguistic accuracy pushed him to “spend much time in revising and re-revising because I [he] did not want my [his] readers and friends to make fun of my [his] stupid grammar errors”. He continued to explain that he never thought about using any rhetorical method in his English writing as he believed that this required a writer to have a huge reservoir of vocabulary and a considerable sense of the English culture to ensure its accuracy and appropriateness.

Thanks to the solid foundation of linguistic knowledge and skills, Shane told me he achieved 94% in the CET - 4 and 96% in the College English Test - 6. However, Shane’s confidence in his English proficiency was destroyed again when he went to a Hong Kong university to do one-year exchange in 2006. His first English written essay, he remembered still vividly, in an English vocabulary class in that university greatly embarrassed him because he made more than 40 mistakes in that written piece. To his surprise, the main problems in his writing still rested in linguistic elements. For example, he lacked the ability to control the new sentence structures he was learning at the time, which resulted in some syntax level mistakes. Also, he



did not have enough knowledge to use some vocabulary in the right context. And he used many colloquial words in his essay which were considered by his lecturer ‘not appropriate’ in English academic writing.

He admitted that he felt that the English learning system and policy in Hong Kong were much more developed and advanced than that of the mainland China because as a prior colony under British rule for almost 100 years, Hong Kong had adopted western countries’ “methods” of English learning and teaching. That embarrassing writing experience made him realize that the acquisition of de-contextualized grammar knowledge and vocabulary through grammar-oriented approaches in China’s English education had led to a very “limited” and “low” study standard for Chinese students.

Interestingly, Shane felt that his English learning became exciting and challenging in Hong Kong as all the subject lecturers spoke English while teaching, and all textbooks were in English. Students needed to attend a diversity of English classes, such as English vocabulary class, speaking class, reading class and so on. Shane started to learn to write long essays and assignments not only for English classes but also for other subjects. He said that he suffered a lot at the beginning, but he gradually came to enjoy it because he felt he was introduced to “real English” which could be used for the academic purposes and personal purposes rather than only for exams.

Thirsty for more exposure to “real English”, Shane subscribed to a famous English magazine – *The Times*. At the beginning, Shane would have to spend two or three hours to read one article, but after two years of reading, he was able to read the whole magazine in two or three hours. Unlike the English textbooks he used in the past, which consisted of simple stories, outdated linguistic forms, and vocabulary isolated from any particular context, reading *The Times* allowed him to have contact with English language related to real-life use. Reflecting on his English study in Hong Kong, Shane enthused that he benefited a lot from this. As a researcher in this field, I felt that he was appreciating the opportunity to engage in “communicative English study”, which was quite different from how he studied English before with a narrow focus on a “detached cognitive activity” that involves “the mind solely in analysis, comprehension, and interpretation” (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 15). In other words, Shane’s English learning experiences in Hong Kong opened up a completely new direction for his future English study in his life.

Shane came to Australia to pursue a Master's degree by research in 2009. He told me he was "writing up his thesis" when I interviewed him. Although his English language capability and skills had improved to a large extent, Shane still did not report much enjoyment in or enthusiasm for his English academic writing. "The content should definitely be original or creative based on my laboratory data; however, the writing itself is kind of boring as I have to conform to the rigid structure and repetitive use of some expressions", Shane asserted. Prompted by his concern about his English writing in the thesis, he attended some writing seminars held by his faculty and also read a lot of journals in his area to learn and memorize the "very helpful but dull rules and techniques" of thesis writing. By doing so, he was able to resolve the structural and linguistic matters once and for all because the commonly-used formats gave him a template to follow in his scholarly writing. Also, scholarly writing in his research field, Engineering, tended to use similar terms and linguistic expressions from which Shane could borrow in his own writing. "They are quick to learn and easy to use. I am happy with them because they reduce the suffering from my writing", Shane observed with irony.

## **8.2 Writing processes: *"I have linear procedures of my writing in my mind, but it hardly works out linearly"***

After reflecting in such depth on his memories of developing skills and confidence as a writer in English, our conversation turned to Shane's reflections on the way he wrote, and used writing, in his thesis for the Master's study. He began by saying that he attached great importance to planning in his thesis chapter writing, and spent most of time thinking about and planning for his writing before starting drafting.

After generating data from his work in the laboratory, he read "thousands of journals" (数以千计的文章) to help him to manage the ideas/data sifting and selection. In this way, he felt this helped him to have a better understanding about what he would write in his thesis chapter. It was a very time-consuming process as he had a mass of information and data at hand. The processes of planning involved 'picking out' the most "competitive" and "innovative" (最有竞争力和最有创新性的) ideas/data to make his research "stand out". In order not to greatly change the content of his writing later, he preferred to spend more time in reading other academics' papers and communicating with his supervisor to weigh ideas in his mind. Another reason for this time-consuming planning is that Shane changed his mind from time to time

when thinking through his data/ideas. He kept negotiating and wrestling with the ideas until he started to write the first draft of the thesis chapter.

When he felt all his ideas were “ready”, he started to plan paragraph-by-paragraph, arranging and rearranging ideas until they appeared to be in “the right position”. At this point in the planning, he said he was adopting the format from others’ theses and journal articles in his discipline of Engineering, which often involved outlining the main ideas for each paragraph in dot points. He was more concerned that how ideas in their emerging areas were organised so that they flowed logically and clearly than he was concerned about writing collections of words that were grammatically correct in relation to each other. He saw himself as continually evaluating his explanation and his arguments by changing the order of the ideas, sometimes deleting information which he deemed to be irrelevant or sometimes adding in new data. He explained this stage to me as “only initial planning for writing”, and yet, that stage would often take up “more than half of the whole writing time” on the thesis chapter.

In the second stage of Shane’s planning, he said that he shifted the focus to more closely attend to what he called the “language used in writing”. Having mapped out a paragraph he would proceed to engage in detailed brainstorming about phrases, clauses, and sequences of words, he wanted to use in each paragraph. For the sake of convenience of editing and changing, he did this work on computer rather than on the paper. This stage included intense focus on the particular disciplinary discourse he was dealing with, along with more general vocabulary, and he spent much time testing out different grammar structures. His brainstorming was so detailed that Shane even calculated the effect of different length of sentences he could use to make his argument more convincing, and what kinds of academic words or terminologies he could use to make his expression more accurate and academic. Shane believed that what he did at this stage was best described as “planning” rather than “drafting” because what appeared on the paper at this stage was sometimes “random and messy expressions or sentences”. He continued these processes of changing, re-writing, deleting and adding for some time. Summing up the importance of planning in his academic writing, Shane told me:

I would like to do a very detailed brainstorming, thinking and planning before drafting because if I write when I am thinking, my brain is not active enough to work out good ideas in terms of language and content. Therefore, I try to complete most of thinking by a full and detailed plan before I actually write. When my specific and detailed outline scheme is ready, I draft my paper non-stop and very quickly. (Shane, interview 1, 22/7/2011)

After this protracted stage of planning, Shane typically “wrote up” a quick draft, which brought together all of the decisions he had made about word choice, phrasing and sentence length. The next stage, which he called “revision” was when reading through his thesis chapter draft “a few times” and making usually minor adjustments. Shane felt that it was rarely necessary for him to make significant changes to the main ideas and organising and representation of data if he had been careful in preparatory stages, and if he had been thorough in his thinking and planning. His main emphasis in this revision stage was on the “clarity of ideas”, which he connected strongly to his English language expression.

He reported a few revision strategies he used to make his language more accurate, concise and clearer. He sometimes changed long sentences into short ones; he sometimes re-arranged sentence order to make the paragraph more fluent; he also tried out different ways of expressing a particular idea by using different sentence structures or key words until he found out the most appropriate and accurate one. He admitted that although he was not making major changes to the writing, this was still a very time-consuming process. When I asked him where he looked for support or assistance during this revision stage, he mentioned the importance of using different kinds of dictionaries, including Chinese-English dictionaries, English-Chinese dictionaries, and English dictionaries because it could offer him diverse equivalent expressions or vocabulary. He explained:

People may think the use of dictionary is very simple, but I do not think they could use it very well. I use different dictionaries for different purposes, such as for searching synonyms,onyms, nuances of meaning, grammar structure and so on. (Shane, interview 1, 22/7/2011)

In order to work out the most appropriate word choice in his specific writing setting, he often explored different websites and weighed up the options and advice given in the different sites. When I asked whether Shane ever collaborated with others at this revision stage, he admitted that he was “an independent writer and reviser”. He was very reluctant to communicate with people around him about his writing, the only exception being his supervisor. He assumed that sharing or taking with other people, no matter with families, friends, or colleagues, did not help to solve the significant difficulties he encountered in his academic writing. He further explained that:

friends and others might offer me some mental support, but I am still the person who actually copes with the problem. Also, I would feel very embarrassed or worried about ‘losing face’ if I shared my writing or my academic challenges with others. (Shane, interview 1, 22/7/2011)

In saying this, Shane reiterated the significance of communication with his supervisor and feedback from his supervisor about his written piece, although he asserted that his revision process was never heavily dependent on his supervisor,

In my writing, I keep in touch with my supervisor. I continuously report the progress of my writing to my supervisor so that he could supervise, monitor or even push my writing progress. For example, I send my preliminary ideas to him at the planning stage so that he could help me to make an evaluation about whether I am on the right track or not. After I finish my draft and some revision, I give it to my supervisor; he would give comments mainly about the contents, but also about some grammatical errors. (Shane, interview 1, 22/7/2011)

When I further asked him whether he would unconditionally accept his supervisor's comments, he gave me a definite answer. Shane considered his supervisor "a distinguished authority in his field who is also a proficient English speaker"; therefore, he always deferred to his supervisor's academic and professional knowledge as well as his use of the English language.

### **8.3 Negotiating identity: "*I want to be as local as possible*"**

In the questionnaire, Shane indicated that he regarded himself as a very critical writer. In the follow-up interviews, he attributed his capability as a critical thinker to his confident and curious nature. In his experience of schooling in China, Chinese teachers did not greatly help students develop an awareness of critical thinking. However, he felt that he showed his critical attitude in the way he organised the contents (ideas) rather than in his use of the English language. For example, when some other researchers pointed out new results in his field, his first response was to question rather than believing it. "I firstly think about why they say so, how much I could trust them, and then I think about how my research can be better than theirs". However, Shane showed a completely opposite attitude towards English language writing produced by native speakers of English.

I am not able to be critical of the language used by them. They speak English as their first language so that they have a better understanding about how to express themselves in a clear and academic way. What I need to do is to follow the rules (规矩) they have set up and developed, and imitate their language in my writing. (Shane, interview 1, 22/7/2011)

Shane further offered explanations in more detail to support his valuing of English native speakers' writing style:

Native speakers have a more sensitive and comprehensive cultural awareness when they pick up some particular words in the writing. They can use any idiom and vocabulary freely in their writing because they could make a quick judgement about its appropriateness. For me, I may know its meaning, but I have limited cultural

knowledge about the use of some particular words in a particular writing setting. For example, I have never known that the informal word “homemade” could be used in academic writing to describe something made from the laboratory. However, for my native colleagues or my supervisor, they grow up with this language and are exposed to English language in their life; they know the subtle differences and various ways of using any particular English word in their writing. (Shane, interview 1, 22/7/2011)

Shane felt that writing/using English as a second language put him in a disadvantageous position in his English scholarly writing. He often struggled with what he described as “the gap” between what he had written in English and what he exactly wanted to express. Although he always considered himself good at grammar skills and knowledge, he still made many grammatical errors in his English writing. He told me that when he learnt English in a secondary school in China, he was able to successfully complete all questions, exercises and drills regarding the use of tense easily and correctly. However, as he wrote his research thesis, he often struggled to use tenses properly in a particular sentence/paragraph without his supervisor’s correction and explanation.

Shane told me that his solution to these problems of confidence and competence in using English correctly in academic writing was to more fully acculturate himself into the western discourse community as soon as possible. He was keenly aware of the differences in writing styles between English writing and Chinese writing, and he carefully “hid” any writing style influenced by Chinese writing in his English writing. He mentioned a few changes he had made in order to cater for his native English readers’ needs. When I read his thesis chapter, I found that he kept using the passive voice, and he never used any first person pronouns, ‘I’, ‘my’, ‘me’ or ‘we’. He said that it was one of big differences between English writing and Chinese writing.

Since I was very little [in China] I have known that I’d better use personal pronouns, such as ‘we’ in formal occasions. I never ask why. It is just there. If you listen to some formal Chinese speeches or read some academic or political articles in Chinese, you will find people always speak in that way, like ‘We have found that... We need to...’ But when I started my thesis, my supervisor and also my colleagues told me that I needed to use passive voice to make my statement more objective and scientific. I need to forget about the use ‘we’ or even ‘I’ in my English writing. (Shane, interview 2, 26/9/2011)

Shane’s beliefs about other differences between English writing and Chinese writing included sentence structure and flow between sentences. Influenced by his previous English education in China, Shane preferred to use longer sentences in his academic writing as he thought it made

his writing more “attractive” and “professional”. However, after his supervisor revised some of his long sentences into shorter sentences, he had come to agree that sometimes short sentences make his writing more “readable”, “powerful” and “accurate”. Regarding the flow and linking in his writing, Shane asserted that Chinese writing tended to link sentences or paragraphs by its ‘meaning’ rather than linking words because Chinese people preferred implicit and indirect ways of expression. However, he was keenly aware of using a range of linking words in his English academic writing with the view of making his writing logically “fluent” and “direct”.

At this point in our conversation, when I asked him about the likelihood of losing his Chinese cultural identity, he appeared confused and tended to contradict himself. He admitted that “if my writing has no grammatical mistakes, and my English expression is very accurate and fluent, I would be very proud of showing my Chinese identity in my English writing. But you know at least at this stage, it is impossible”. Shane said that it was still a long way to go for his final goal of English learning. Before he was capable of writing in English like an English native speaker, he would rather hide his Chinese background.

When I showed my curiosity about his current English writing style, Shane answered that “my current writing style was no style”. After years of English learning and writing, Shane believed he had developed his own understanding and preferences about English academic writing. He disliked the stable and fixed formats, the routines and the regulations. He remembered reading a book written by a researcher in his field. He was amazed by the writer’s creative and humorous ways of explaining the scientific content. “Reading that research book was like reading a novel”, he explained. The experience of reading that book had a significant impact on his English academic writing. For example, from then on he tried to introduce some fresh and new vocabulary and some more lively rhetorical methods in his writing. However, he was very disappointed to see his trials fail. His supervisor changed all his new words back to the often-used words in his discipline, even though one word might have been used “one hundred times” in one piece of writing. Also, all his lively rhetorical phrasing was changed into plain sentences.

When I asked about his feelings about his supervisor’s corrections, he said he was upset at the beginning, but later he accepted it all because he believed his supervisor had a better control of the English written language than him. His supervisor told him that “clarity” was more

important than “fancy expression”, and also professional words were fixed so there was no point for him to think about an alternative word for the sake of diversity of expression. Shane had once harboured a desire to be “a unique researcher”, and for the uniqueness to be apparent in the way he used the English language, but ultimately he gave it up because his current academic goal was to complete his thesis and publish his writing. He did not want to take any risk at this stage. “Following the mainstream is the best and safest path to reach my academic goal”, he said. “The readers expect my research results rather than my story; therefore, my writing priority should be clarity, fluency and accuracy”.

At the end of our second interview, Shane expressed his own expectation on his English academic writing. He hoped he could form a unique writing style in English which would be “correct, clear and accurate” but also showing his Chinese researcher identity. He believed this would only be possible when his capabilities and confidence as a writer of academic English was better than it was now.



## Chapter 9 Susan's Narrative

Susan, in her late 20s', was a second year PhD student in the Faculty of Education in Urban University when I interviewed her. Susan had encountered various challenges in her ongoing journey to learn to write confidently and competently as a postgraduate Chinese student in English. In her mind, the most important challenge of English academic writing was the imperative to be critical, logical and sociable. Also, she struggled with the tension between what she understood as a Chinese style of English writing and English writing styles developed in English speaking countries. She dealt with this tension by trying to position herself in her English writing as engaged in various dialogic interactions with multiple perspectives. She saw this dialogic approach as helping her to construct a powerful and dynamic identity as a writer. In my account of our interviews together, I have tried to capture the dialogic spirit that underpinned much of Susan's thinking about her English writing, and also to illustrate how Susan's changing and fluid identity was (re)created through different social and writing contexts.

### 9.1 Learning to write in academic English: *"I do not want to accept the myth of 'the authority power'"*

Like most Chinese students born before the 1990s, Susan first encountered English language in a secondary school located in her hometown – Qilunhe – a small city in the northeast of China. She could not recall having any enthusiasm for or passion about English language study at that time, which she attributed to her teacher's traditional pedagogy with a heavy focus on functional grammar and vocabulary. Susan felt that it was "easy but boring". Her view of English writing at that time was that it was quite mechanical in nature. She remembered her teachers teaching English language through drills and language exercises, without any connection to a particular social context, and she remembered the variety of fixed templates she was made to follow from what she now considered to be poorly-designed textbooks and rigid curriculums. In her words, "I did not need to think about ideas as the teacher gave us the content/ideas. The only thing I needed to do was to find the right words and then put them into the fixed structure". Susan said that she studied English like a "robot" as "there was no emotion, thinking or communication needed".

On graduating from her senior high, Susan enrolled in a Law degree in a university near to her hometown. Although this university course involved more intensive contact with English, the teaching approach was similar. The teachers routinely resorted to explanation of English language in terms of grammar and vocabulary, with drill practice and multiple-choice questions being the dominant forms of pedagogy. However, the expectations and standards expected by her English teachers in the university tended to be higher. Susan explained that rather than using only short sentences to guarantee grammatical correctness, she needed to write “more flowery, sophisticated and longer” sentences to show her high level of English writing ability. This would earn her better grades, she said.

Upon graduation, Susan travelled to London to pursue a Master’s degree in Law in a prestigious university in the United Kingdom. Two years later, Susan came to Urban University in Australia to study for her PhD in the Faculty of Education. When I asked Susan about the differences in English academic writing she experienced in these two English-speaking universities, she felt that English-speaking countries shared similar standards and conventions with respect to English academic writing.

Throughout our two conversations, Susan gave examples of how she learned to write in English after she embarked upon her study in English-speaking countries. One big challenge Susan felt about her English academic writing in Australia was related to critical thinking. Susan reported that at the beginning she was not comfortable with challenging or questioning teachers because she thought that students should always respect the teacher’s ‘authority’:

Chinese students learn that we should follow what the teacher says...even if the teacher makes mistakes...we need to be humble. If students point out some opposite ideas, their teachers will lose face. In this way, the harmonious relationship between students and teacher will be broken. That is what I do not want to happen in my study. (Susan, interview 1, 1/6/2011)

However, this approach did not extend to challenging renowned experts. She said that she was not “professionally strong enough to criticize the big academic figures” in her area. Therefore, it was incredibly difficult for her to be actively engaged in what she sometimes called “two-sided thinking”, in which it was possible to adequately consider arguments on both sides or from multiple perspectives (Chan, Ho & Ku, 2011). However, she felt ashamed that in China she had grown up without learning “how to challenge others in a professional and skilful way”:

You know in China the standard for judging a student’s value is the exam score. But all the questions in the exam paper have fixed answers. Students can find out the

answers to questions in the textbooks. Nobody...neither teachers nor parents care about our own ideas. We only need to memorize...rote learning...repeat others' already-established thoughts in the exams. The [Chinese] education system trained me in this way. People around me...my teachers...my parents...my friends... all judge me by the test score. I do not need to think about myself...my own thoughts in my study. Not to mention questioning others. (Susan, interview 1, 1/6/2011)

When Susan studied in the UK and Australia, she had many opportunities to engage in professional discussion or seminars. In these seminars, she found that her peers seemed to be very confident to present their ideas and question teachers/professors. To her surprise, rather than being offended, teachers/professors were mostly very open-minded and flexible, and willing to reconsider alternative viewpoints. Influenced by them, Susan was determined to learn to be more critical. At the beginning, she “dared not criticize others” unless she worked out a better idea. She tended to persevere with an idea until she “fully understood it” and “perfectly developed it”. But gradually, she realized that she needed to cultivate “the tolerance to ambiguity” (Ku & Ho, 2010) in discussion because through the process of dialogue about the different viewpoints, she could clarify her ideas more effectively and arrive at a richer understanding.

In our conversations, Susan described how the changes in the conception and skills of her critical thinking she developed also impacted on the relations between her supervisor and herself. Susan said that she no longer felt any hierarchical power differences between them. Rather, as many other research students in the western world, the relationship she developed with her supervisor was now “informal” (Hofstede, 2009), which encouraged her to engage in dialogues and debate freely with her supervisor. She greatly benefited from this type of relationship in terms of the development of her critical thinking, confidence and professional qualities:

I am very lucky to have an open-minded supervisor. We are open to each other...very comfortable when communicating. I feel there is no high and low position between us. Although I am less knowledgeable than him, he takes my views seriously. I feel he respects me. That makes me feel more confident. I am not afraid of proposing opposite ideas. I like this kind of relationship...it helps me to become a more productive thinker. (Susan, interview 2, 1/10/2011)

Besides the challenges related to critical thinking, Susan's path to building up her professional identity in her academic writing was not smooth either. Susan described her experience of writing her first academic essay in English in a UK university as being “embarrassing” and “painful”. She recalled that the topic was concerned with the war between Japan and China. In

her attempt to emulate a more western style of writing, she tried to inject some personal thoughts and emotions to support the arguments in her essay, but this was criticized by her lecturer. Her writing was so terrible that her supervisor asked her to “rewrite” it. She happened to come across a warm-hearted German classmate who had studied in China for five years. He kindly explained to Susan the conventions of academic writing in English-speaking countries, which highlighted “objectivity”. According to him, only the writers with a high academic status could freely use “their personal experience” as they have “the power of authority”.

Conscious of the need to develop what Bakhtin (1981) would describe as the “authoritative voice” she believed was needed in academic writing, Susan felt more and more confused about how to position herself in her academic English writing. “If only the big professionals could write about their personal feelings and experience, when could I be professional enough to write about my own stories?” Susan said she did not want to passively accept the myth of “the authority power” in English academic writing. And so she would invest a great deal of time and effort to work out the differences between her writing of personal stories and the writing of renowned researchers/scholars. It was certainly more complex than merely complying with the rules of “role/power of authority” as how her classmate narrowly perceived them. Nevertheless, as she explained in our interview, these experienced senior academic writers “could explore their personal experience from a theoretical and professional perspective”. They were more than “story-tellers”. “If I want to use my personal experience in my academic writing, I need to gain the skills to do it in a professional way. Otherwise, I have to leave out my personal experience to some extent as I am not writing a journal entry in English.” Since then, Susan had been keen to explore in her academic writing the dialogic relationship between her personal experience and the associated theories in her area. In this way, Susan saw herself as taking ownership over her writing, developing a richer sense of herself as an academic writer, and gaining a clearer vision of her identity with respect to English scholarly writing.

## **9.2 Strategies developed in English academic writing: “*It is an over-and-over process*”**

Susan attached the highest importance in her academic writing not just to communicating facts, but to *developing* or *exploring* ideas. In our interviews together, Susan shared with me different strategies she used to develop ideas for and in her writing. Firstly, she worked with a wide range of online resources from Google Scholar and the university library databases. At the

same time, she also resorted to hard-copy sources – such as scholarly books and journals and previously completed theses – which she obtained from the university library or sometimes from peers in her faculty. Although Susan claimed that she did most of her searching and reading by herself, she was also guided by her supervisor from time to time in these practices. She read recursively – that was, she would often read and re-read, and then later revisit texts that she believed had “valuable ideas”. Those ideas from her reading which “convinced” her were those she wanted to “borrow” and “appropriate” in her writing. However, Susan said that she was cautious of the risk of “plagiarism” in these practices. She hoped that the ideas she liked most from others’ written work could be identified and then developed them by paraphrasing and modifying based on the context in which she wanted to use them. She described this as a process of negotiating a dialogue between others’ ideas and her own thoughts and responses. Throughout all this, she tried to keep a keen awareness of the context in which the writer’s ideas had been developed.

Prior to beginning to write any thesis chapter, Susan reported that she repeatedly reconsidered the ideas she planned to use in her writing. A crucial part of this reconsideration was organizing her ideas in an outline by dot points. Outlining was challenging and she had to invest considerable efforts in constructing and articulating the structure of her ideas in advance of drafting:

The planning is painful because sometimes I have developed heaps of ideas. I have to decide which one is better and how to arrange them in a reasonable... and logical manner. I like to write my ideas [in this outline] in Chinese firstly...my first language you know helps clarify my thoughts, and then I translate into English. But sometimes I am short of good ideas. I am desperate to develop more. My brain keeps working...non-stop...even when I am sleeping on the bed. I cannot help thinking. (Susan, interview 1, 1/6/2011)

In contrast, Susan’s subsequent drafting phases were relatively “straightforward”: with the final version of the outline, she said she only needed to write out the ideas sentence by sentence. When drafting, she kept in mind another important function of reading – what she had learned about rhetorical and lexico-grammatical information. As an ESL writer, she needed to constantly return to others’ written research as well as her own previous published papers to “gather” language fragments she could use in her upcoming writing. “It is safe and convenient to adopt the language expressions I have used in my own published papers,” said Susan. It was this constant desire for more usable and manipulable phrases in English that lead her to do more extensive reading of academic but also non-academic genres. For example:

I know my English could not be as good as these native speakers. I try to do something to make it up. I remind myself to read English magazines or newspapers...as often as possible. Sometimes when I read some breaking news in Chinese, I go to BBC or CNN websites to search and read the English written version. I pay particular attention to what kinds of expressions the journalists use to describe these issues. Well, sometimes I am happy to do so; sometimes I push myself to do it. I do not have a choice. As a foreign researcher, we have dual pressures, from both the language deficiency and the academic. (Susan, interview 1, 1/6/2011)

Susan said that she needed to work on a series of drafts in an ongoing process of revision and editing, followed by further revising and editing. Susan sought out a range of strategies to do this revision:

I revise [the piece] by myself after I finish my first draft. I briefly check the language and grammar. It is quick because I only correct the obvious errors. Then I put away my writing for a while, and then re-read it again. This time I pretend myself as a reader...as an outsider, see whether my writing is clear and understandable...I ask myself questions...I try to be an intolerant and fussy reader...looking for small mistakes or obscure expressions. (Susan, interview 1, 1/6/2011)

Susan felt that peer checking was always beneficial in her revising stages throughout her academic writing. She had developed collaborative friendships with a number of researchers in her faculty. However, she appeared to be very selective in choosing reviewers for her writing from peers: they must be native English speakers to maximise the value of peer checking. According to Susan,

English native speakers have a better feel for language. But I do not trust every native English speaker. They must be research people, because I believe English researchers are perfectionists. I will be confident if they tell me they could understand everything. If my writing happens to be Chinglish or unclear, because of grammar...vocabulary...or even punctuation, they point it out to me as well. I change it without any doubt, because it affects clarity. But, they rarely comment on the content of my writing. Actually sometimes I am happy to get some feedback in this regard. They are research people, so they are cautious and rigorous. I think they do not want to say anything unless they do research on it by themselves. (Susan, interview 1, 1/6/2011)

Susan emphasized that the most important “reviewer” for her written work was her supervisor. Her supervisor was always the last person who read her writing because Susan did not want to show it to her supervisor until she was “personally satisfied with” her writing after a few rounds of revising and editing. Susan reported that she tried to take the initiative by highlighting the points which she was not sure about regarding either professional content or language so that she would be more likely to obtain the feedback she expected from her supervisor. In order to do so, she kept taking notes about her questions in the processes of her own revision and peer

revision. When she received feedback from her supervisor, she reflected and worked on every single comment carefully and intently. If possible, she preferred to discuss any written feedback with her supervisor in person to explore her ideas in more depth. Susan's experience of revision and feedback is in line with Antón's (1999) definition of sociocultural feedback which gives prominence to dialogic interactions that enable language learners to actively take part in their own study rather merely rely on 'input' from the expert (supervisor).

### **9.3 Negotiating identity: "*I have to change*"**

Susan was highly aware of her bilingual identity in her English academic writing. In our conversations, she admitted that she felt a high level of confusion and intellectual struggle in her overseas study in both the UK and Australia. One explanation for her confusion related to her family background. Coming from a Chinese intellectual family, she started extensive reading in Chinese when she was very young. Her father, who was a Chinese teacher in China, always encouraged her to read books related to various topics and in different genres. Gradually, she accumulated a large and varied vocabulary and colourful Chinese idioms. For example, Susan tended to adopt proverbs and idioms as often as possible in her Chinese writing because a good Chinese writer is supposed to acquire a broad knowledge of Chinese classics and poetic expressions (Hu, 2014). She transferred this Chinese writing style into her English writing, which emphasized the use of "flowery" and "sophisticated" expressions in her English writing. What is more, as Chinese writers prefer to use different rhetorical methods to indirectly externalize one's emotion or describe something more vividly (Li, 1996), Susan reported that she had liked to use metaphors in her English academic written work, a practice which was not well received by those who assessed her academic work. Susan shared with me the following story:

I remember I used the word "brick", comparing it with the unit of Chinese family...like how I use in my Chinese writing. I wrote: 'In China's society, the Chinese families are bricks in the whole structure which supports the society.' But my English speaking friends told me it did not make sense. I had to change "bricks" into "family units" although I still think the use of brick is more visual...vivid...and better communicates my initial meaning. (Susan, interview 1, 1/6/2011)

Susan's 'awkward' use of the brick metaphor became somewhat of an embarrassment to her, especially when her supervisor had trouble understanding it. After discussing this with her supervisor and friends, she began to tune into the many cultural differences affecting the meaning-making in her second language English writing: in China, people regard the brick as the basic component of the house while in English-speaking countries people tend to view the

foundation (before bricks are laid) as the basic component of the house. That was only one of the examples Susan encountered involving a “clash of two cultures” in her English writing. I asked Susan about how she managed to survive in-between these two cultures. It is worth quoting her answer at some length:

I had a Chinese classmate in the UK. He was a very confident writer and never afraid of expressing himself in...Chinese English. The teacher could identify his writing very easily. I do not know how the teachers thought about him... but he was very special...I think...but I know other students often made fun of his writing behind his back...like our classmates from Italy. I felt embarrassed when I heard others laugh at his English writing. But at the same time, I admired him. He was so brave to follow his heart. He integrated Chinese writing culture into his English writing. But it was too dangerous. He faced much criticism and sneering. I could not do this. He was a very tough person, able to withstand all of this. (Susan, Interview 2, 1/10/2011)

Susan further explained that in order to write freely and productively in-between two cultures, she believed that every ESL writer needed to build up “a comfortable zone”. This zone might vary due to writers’ different personalities, social networks, and the writing contexts with regard to the topic, the discipline area and the purpose of the particular piece of writing. Compared with the classmate she mentioned above, Susan tended to be more conscious, conservative and sensitive. She did not want to take any risk in her English writing in terms of the use of language. She did not want to be the target of others’ gossip or teasing; she was afraid of “losing face”. More importantly, Susan believed that as an international researcher, her writing needed to cater for the majority of readers’ needs, most of whom were definitely English speakers. She was very reluctant to totally “waive” all Chinese cultural traits in her English writing. At the same time, she always gave priority to clarity in written communication. In so doing, she tried to work on a kind of boundary between Chinese and western cultures – what Bhabha (1996) and others have termed a “third space”. In this space, she could draw on linguistic resources from different cultures to enable richer meaning making in her writing, and it helped to develop her identity of one who can operate “in-between” and across multiple funds of knowledge and discourses.

Moreover, Susan realized that Chinese academic writers preferred to use “abstract” and “complex” sentence structures. In her words, “many Chinese believe sophisticated language gives readers an impression of outstanding academic qualities”. However, she tended to think that English scholarly written language in England and Australia, at least amongst the academic papers she read in the discipline of Education, tended to be more “straightforward” and “plain”.



In discussing her current English academic writing, she shared with me some important changes in her beliefs about academic writing in English:

Different from how I wrote in English in China, I am now writing based on my own ideas and my own research. I have to make sure my writing is understandable, readable, and clear enough to my readers. I am more than happy to use simple and direct expressions in my writing to make my writing clear and accurate. (Susan, interview 1, 1/6/2011)

To my surprise, when I read a short excerpt of Susan's PhD thesis draft, I still found the frequent use of long sentences in her English writing. When I probed her about this, she explained that writing short and concise sentences required even higher writing skills which were beyond her capability at this stage. She was trained to write English sentences based on English education paradigm in China – “the longer, the better”. She had got used to writing long and complicated sentences. It was a hard habit to break. She admitted that the use of multiple but connected clauses was very convenient to her as she could “squeeze a few ideas into one sentence”. She felt she always struggled with writing short and direct sentences. This was one of a number of struggles felt by Susan when she intensively engaged in her English scholarly writing:

Breaking up sentences [into shorter ones], sometimes, to me is like breaking my continuous thinking. Sometimes my brain goes very fast when I am writing on my research. I write long sentences, using clauses and brackets because I want to record my thoughts in the shortest time. I try my best to do some organization when writing them down. When I write, I sometimes do not realize that I am writing long sentences. When I read [what I have written], I cannot break the habit either. When my supervisor points out the unclear parts and reminds me of stopping writing such long and confusing sentences, I then try to break off my sentences. But it is indeed hard to me, and it always takes me so much time. (Susan, interview 2, 1/10/2011)

To Susan, generating awareness of the need for clarity, and enhancing her ability to use more concise and clear sentences were two of the main goals for her English academic writing. Listening to Susan's account, I got the sense that she was bothered by her “long” sentences. I was curious to know what she felt about these differences in language style. Interestingly, Susan began by answering the question in a very reflexive manner:

I personally prefer the language style I am learning and using now to the one I learnt in China. But it has nothing to do with ownership of English language. Nobody forces me to do so. I read, I write, I talk, I compare and finally I establish my own evaluation about English writing. If I could achieve the same level of accuracy and clarity by long and complicated sentences one day, like most of Chinese researchers writing in academic Chinese, I will be more than happy to do this. But at this stage, I need to learn to write in short and simple sentences to improve the clarity of my writing. As a

researcher, I need the accurate and clear language to present my research findings to my readers. (Susan, interview 2, 1/10/2011)

Susan's attitudes to language style displayed a conflicting tension about how to balance the length of sentences writing. In some sense, it depicts a shift of perspective from the "monological" way of learning to write as she was required to do (McKnight, 2004) – that is, by drills and skills and learning by rote – to a more dialogic way of learning to write that involves a keen awareness of the need to establish meaningful connections with the anticipated addressee (Bakhtin, 1981). She was no longer content to be a passive learner of the English language and English language writing skills by accepting whatever she learnt from teachers/lecturers. At every step in writing processes, she was conscious of negotiating different language choices and different styles of English written language which considered her intercultural background, as she grappled with the most appropriate word, clause, length of sentence and lexical nuance in her writing.

It occurred to me that even in our interview Susan reflected something of the dialogic spirit that drove her writing processes, and her consideration of meaning making resources she was continuously developing and honing. As an academic writer she self-consciously operated on and across cultural boundaries, but also historical boundaries. For instance, she was often grappling with some learning and incidents from her past and interweaving them into a comprehensive understanding about construction of her present self in English academic writing. Susan's view of identity was itself dialogic and dynamic – that is, she was responsive to the people she was working with, the texts she was reading and writing, and the contexts and social spaces in which this was happening. She admitted to a constant struggle over cultural and intellectual identity, as a Chinese postgraduate student researching in Australia and writing in English. Ivanič (1998) would describe this struggle as a "crisis" of identity (p. 12), in that she felt a "mismatch between the social contexts which have constructed my [her] identities in the past and the new social contexts" in which she was studying and living in Australia. Nevertheless, she consciously negotiated this crisis in ways which enabled her to find her own "comfortable zone", which is in line with Bhabha's definition of a "third space", to live and learn with differences and ambiguity and continuously build a new identity.

Following my presentation of the narrative cases of myself and the four other participants in this study, in Part Five I present my analysis and discussion of the data with respect to the conceptual framework outlined in Part Two.

## **PART FIVE: DISCUSSION**

## Chapter 10 Dialogic Writing Practices

### 10.1 Introduction

In these two discussion chapters, my research questions serve as a guideline for my data analysis. The three questions are:

- (1) What are Chinese postgraduate students' understandings and experiences of developing their academic writing practices in English in Australian universities?
- (2) What factors influence and mediate Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing practices?
- (3) How do Chinese postgraduate students negotiate their researcher-writer identities in English academic writing?

In the present chapter, I mainly address the first research question focusing on Chinese postgraduate students' understandings and experiences of English academic writing in Australian universities. I analyze the Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing practices underpinned by an awareness emerging from my critical review of the literature, that shows how acts of English academic writing do not happen in isolation. Rather, they exist in the dialogue between/within texts and people, which occurs through internal and external situations. Drawing on Bakhtin's dialogic theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, I show how the participants' English academic writing practices were intimately bound up with the dynamic and invariable interchange they experienced with a range of voices from various sources. These voices might "supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 291-292). In almost, but not all instances, they helped the Chinese postgraduate students develop and improve their English academic writing.

In this chapter, by analyzing the preceding narrative cases, I identify four categories of dialogue in the participants' English academic writing practices. These included: 1) interpersonal dialogue; 2) intrapersonal dialogue; 3) intertextual dialogue; and 4) intratextual dialogue. I have used these four categories to develop a conceptual framework, one which is underpinned by three related sets of theoretic discourses: Bakhtin's dialogic theory; Vygotsky's concept of inner speech; and MacLachlan and Reid's (1994) conceptualizing of four kinds of interpretive frames that can be seen as inherent in academic literacy practices.

In the first two sections of this chapter, I investigate the interpersonal and then the intrapersonal dialogue the Chinese postgraduate students participated in when producing English academic writing.

## **10.2 Interpersonal dialogue**

In analyzing the English academic writing practices of the Chinese postgraduate students who participated in this study, I propose the concept of ‘interpersonal dialogue’ to encompass the range of communication practices (written/oral) that occur between the Chinese postgraduate students and other people in their course of English academic writing. The interpersonal nature of academic writing is often evident in the way the participants talked about their English scholarly writing. All of the participants were involved in a range of interpersonal dialogue with a range of people, including supervisors, peers/colleagues, tutors/supporters from seminars they attended or language support organizations they belonged to. To various extents, these were valuable to them as they strived to construct academic texts that would be accepted and valued by their (English speaking) academic discourse communities. In this way, academic writing can be seen as most certainly a set of socially situated practices and a fundamentally dialogic activity (e.g., Lillis, 2003; Prior, 2001). Some of the participants, like Susan, appeared selective about who she interacted with. For example, she reported that she only preferred to communicate or seek support from higher-performing postgraduate students or English native speakers.

Due to different personal beliefs about the value of social interactions with others during English scholarly writing, all of the Chinese postgraduate students participated in social dialogue with varied levels of motivation. For example, Helen tended to interact with and seek support from quite a wide range of people when she engaged in academic writing, and she appeared predisposed to develop what some might call a collaborative relationship with them. She said:

I believe every different person has his advantages, either in language or research ideas. I need to learn widely from other people’s strong points (博采众长). I am keen on looking for support from others, such as my supervisor, my colleagues, my language tutors, even the review panel for my journal. I am excited about their critiques. The more people that read my text and give my advice, the more thorough and clearer my writing would become. (Helen, interview 2, 16/9/2011)

Helen’s positive beliefs about interpersonal dialogue suggest that she relied on this form of dialogue to develop the clarity and quality she wanted to produce. This finding parallels

Caffarella and Barnett's (2000) study on the role of social interactions in writing, emphasising its potential in working out solutions to the difficulties they encounter as they attempt to improve their writing.

Another example of the varying motivation to engage in social interaction is Shane. Compared with Helen, Shane seemed to be a little reluctant to communicate with people around him, apart from his supervisor. He thought that other people could not help him deal with problems and he also did not want others to know about his difficulties, for fear of him 'losing face'. It is interesting to note that at the time of my interviews with Shane, his thesis writing was not progressing smoothly. He had, in fact, postponed the proposed date of his thesis submission twice. Although in the interviews he did not directly relate this to the limited social support he received (or sought out) while writing. He told me that in the final stages of revising his thesis, he realized that he had to desperately look for a proof-reader to help him with his English language usage in the thesis, as he was too far behind in his thesis writing. Upon reflection, Shane started to realize that his understanding of English academic writing practices as an individual phenomenon resulted in him quarantining himself and his writing practices from interaction with most other people, and this appeared to be hindering his writing progress. This study has theorized that cognitive development and learning processes are deeply social in nature. On the basis of that theory, Shane's partial quarantining of himself in his writing practices was limiting his chances of dialogic negotiation with different social voices, and this was limiting the potential for him to make meaning for himself and for his intended readers (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Villami & De Guerrero, 2000).

This study has also acknowledged other studies (e.g. Riazi, 1997) that suggest scaffolding in academic writing practices initially comes in the form of assisted instructions from more experienced tutors and peers in the early stage. Ada was initially willing to "take", "accept" and "follow" what she learnt from others in a more straightforward form of interpersonal dialogue. However, in the later stages of her PhD candidature, she tended to be actively involved in more complex negotiating and even "arguing" with feedback from peers and her tutor as she sought to make meaning in her writing and present her own voice in her academic discourse. In this way, Ada was able to move beyond a linear writing model of "write-talk-revise-(repeat)" to a model that was more dialogical and flexible (Pomerantz & Kearney, 2012, p. 222). This shift suggests she changed from being more of a passive receiver of the input of others to an active social participant.

Susan also said she developed her critical capability from interactions with colleagues in informal settings or official seminars. Through encountering various voices in discussion, she learned to question and criticize others, and she came to feel that she could not always follow and accept all of the different views she heard. Both Ada's and Susan's growth supports Clay's (2005) idea about the facilitative nature of social scaffolding from more experienced others, and its value in supporting L2 students' language acquisition and cognitive development. The collaborative dialogue Ada and Susan engaged in inspired them to be more aware of gaps in their linguistic knowledge and to engage in conscious reflection in response to various conversations and feedback. Engaging in the scaffolded interactions or less formal oral interactions with peers allowed them to better focus their learning and writing, and this in turn helped them to build their writing abilities (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994).

All the participants in this study said that they valued interactions with their supervisor/s in the course of their developing a piece of academic writing, whether that was a thesis or a journal article or another academic paper. These interactions sometimes appeared to be at the level of a collaboration with their supervisors, and they claimed that this helped them solve common linguistic problems, which they saw as one of their main challenges in English academic writing. More importantly, through dialogue with their supervisors, and especially the written or oral feedback they received from their supervisors, they learnt to reflect and develop their voices through their English writing as well as regulate their writing from different perspectives. For example, it helped them to take the initiative in their writing (from supervisors' 'prompting' and reminding) and it helped them to become more confident and independent writers (from supervisors' research support and encouragement). With more and more collaborative and scaffolded interactions with their supervisors, they were able to increase their self-regulation, internalize their own English academic writing practices, and refine various writing strategies (see also Ewert, 2009).

One critical factor affecting the quality of the Chinese researcher-writers' interpersonal dialogue was the equal or reciprocal relationship they had built up with their supervisors. All of the participants admitted they had previously had hierarchical relationships with their teachers in China (Ryan, 2005). They had been culturally 'trained' to respect the authoritative status of their Chinese teachers. Participants reported some significant changes happened in this regard after they started to pursue education in Australian universities and they had experienced many benefits from a more "equal" and "friendly" relationship. For instance,



Susan reported on the “new” experience of engaging in discussion and conversations freely and comfortably with her supervisor. This constitutes a particularly significant change for student writers with a Chinese cultural background. In my own case, when I talked with my supervisor about the influence of Chinese students’ cultural values on English writing during my doctoral thesis writing, I had the sense that he showed interest, respect and understanding of what I was presenting, whether or not my ideas were coming from a somewhat different cultural perspective. That offered me much confidence and inspired me to develop my ideas in more depth. In fact, my own experience as a Chinese postgraduate student completing a PhD study in Australia supported the views of most participants, but not all, about the value of such interpersonal interactions with a graduate research supervisor. This coincides with Gui’s (2009) findings on the dialogical relationship that enables teachers and students to respect each other’s knowledge and experiences, refine their critical consciousness, and increase their capacity to self-regulate in their writing processes (but this did not mean working completely independently).

This study has also shown that Chinese postgraduate students’ attitudes towards the feedback (written and oral) provided on their English written work by their supervisors were different. Ada was upset with her supervisor’s early corrections/comments as she thought they indicated her unsatisfactory academic writing capability. In contrast, Helen was excited about the negative comments from her supervisor as she believed that “the negative feedback reminded myself of the weaknesses of my writing and I should explore further on it later”. On the other hand, Ada and Shane sometimes were not inclined to question their supervisors because of their respect for their supervisors’ authority and personal feelings toward their supervisor – cf. Ada’s sense of her supervisor as a mother figure. However, their humility and respectful attitude did not make them feel powerless in the interactions because it was their choice to deal with their supervisor’s suggestions in “a Chinese student’s way”. Therefore, their compromise in dialogue did not affect their motivation and autonomy as English writers.

This study has conceptualized writing as, at least potentially, a dialogic activity which occurs ‘externally’ – such as involving interpersonal interactions with other people – and ‘internally’ (Motta, Rafalski, Rangel, & Souza, 2013). In the following, I will continue on discussing the nature of ‘inner dialogue’ which can occur in a Chinese postgraduate researcher-writer writing in English – a dialogue with himself/herself ‘internally’ during his/her English academic writing.

### 10.3 Intrapersonal dialogue

Intrapersonal dialogue in this study refers to writers' internal management of inner speech and dialogue about their writing, sometimes bringing ideas to a clearer focus, sometimes helping to make meaning in more articulate ways. Participants in this study, with the exception of Helen, rarely spoke explicitly about their awareness of intrapersonal dialogue in their interviews, and yet it was often just beneath the surface of the stories they were telling. All of my participants were research students who were required to propose some innovative thoughts in their theses. To do so, they definitely needed to engage in intrapersonal dialogue to create, develop, evaluate and regulate their thinking in English academic writing. However, due to the grammar-oriented English teaching and learning approaches (Richard, 1988) and skills approaches to writing (Lea & Street, 1998) which Chinese schools adopted for English education in the time when this generation of students attended school, the participants appeared to have received little or no guidance or teaching about creative and critical thinking (Li, 2011) in their previous education in China. It was significant that all participants told a similar story about not needing to "think" about the structure and even the ideas for any English essay they were required to write in China because the structure and even the ideas were provided by the teacher. The previous writing experience in school led most of them not to value reflection, inner dialogue or what Vygotsky (1986) refers to as "inner speech" activities in their English academic writing.

Shane, who tended to refer to writing as a solo activity (e.g., Mirzaei & Eslami, 2015), reported that he considered what he called "changeable thinking" to be at its peak during planning stages when he wrote academically. He described himself a "divergent" thinker; most of his thinking, he said, happened in a spontaneous, free-flowing and non-linear manner (cf. Guilford, 1977). He never worried about being short of ideas. Rather his concern was how to manage this divergent thinking. He reported that he had to constantly wrestle with his thoughts and change tack from time to time, and he thought this to be an "inefficient" and "time-consuming" aspect of his writing practices. On many occasions in my interviews with Shane, he did not seem to appreciate the dialogic nature of inner speech (Parr, 2010), and what Moffett (1982) refers to approvingly as being "lost in thought" (p. 237) at times during writing processes. Rather, he thought of it as a weakness of his and a hindrance to effective writing. In effect, this study has affirmed some of the dialogic literature in the field of academic writing pedagogy, which says that writers' thinking and practices might be influenced by a rich mixture of various elements, such as their memory, reflection or writing context. This literature argues that a writer's

unpredictable and spontaneous internal dialogue may lead to valuing a multivocal self, which may disagree, confirm, or challenge one's own previous position (Motta, Rafalski, Rangel, & Souza, 2013). On the one hand, this promotion of a 'dialogical self' can encourage further thinking and inspire the writer to deal with new, complex and diverse knowledge. On the other hand, it is important for the writer to acquire some meditative techniques to regulate his/her divergent thinking to some extent, which apparently Shane struggled with.

Compared with Shane, Helen enjoyed intrapersonal dialogic thinking and even a sense of a 'dialogic self' in her writing practices. Helen described herself as good at both "divergent thinking" and "convergent" thinking (Guilford, 1977) in English scholarly writing. To an extent, she allowed her ideas and divergent thinking to emerge in a spontaneous, free and flowing way. In tension with this recognition, she admitted that she consciously tried to organize and structure her ideas and information using what she saw as purposeful convergent thinking. The combination of these two types of thinking assisted her overall writing practices and management of her ideas in particular. Vygotsky's conceptualizing of writing as a "speech without an interlocutor, addressed to an absent or an imaginary person or to no one in particular" (Vygotsky 1989, p. 181), is consistent with Helen's story of asking herself questions and then answering these questions. The processes of asking and answering her own questions, she believed, helped her to regulate her thoughts and enhance her writing. In a sense, the inner speech appeared to allow her to internally rehearse or imagine conversations with others (Guerrero, 1991).

In order to regulate and mediate her 'backward-and-forward thinking', Helen used several reflective strategies in her revision processes. She gave the impression that she was able to let her inner speech flow spontaneously when revising her work, but also to exercise some measure of self-control through purposeful inner speech strategies such as her "checklist" and "PowerPoint slides" (for example, narrowing down the inner speech or maintaining the main writing goal/direction with less distraction). Through verbalizing aloud her "stream of consciousness" (Moffett, 1982, p. 231), she could clarify her thoughts, evaluate and correct her language structures, and even develop better self-confidence (Guerrero, 1991). For Helen, inner dialogue allowed her to regulate her writing through self-observation, self-evaluation, and self-reaction (Bandura, 1986). These stories of benefits of inner dialogue support Xiang's (2004) research that "self-monitoring" is very helpful in revision of the ESL writers' drafts and improvement of their overall writing proficiency.

Like Shane, I also experienced struggles and some measure of confusion when moving back-and-forth in my intrapersonal dialogue (e.g., thinking about and reflecting upon my ideas) when writing in academic English. On face value, one might judge that this kind of cyclical process was interrupting my overall writing progress, and perhaps I should have sought to minimize it. Certainly, some literature supports this view, such as Baroudy's (2008) comment that writing should never be a "highly fluid" and always forward-moving process (p. 47). His advice is that writers need to learn a certain tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, and practice the ability to cope with complexity and contingency (Baroudy, 2008). And yet Baroudy's advice here is premised on the assumption that writing is an individual, non-social practice. For me, as for many of my participants, rather than remaining "stuck" there, I tended to seek support and interact with people around me, such as my supervisors and peers, and this tended to promote the inner speech about whatever I was writing about. Using Vygotskian discourse, Swain (2005) would explain my practices by saying that the dialogic relations between my mental functioning (intrapersonal dialogue) and my joint activities with others (interpersonal dialogue) offered me an effective solution to most problems I encountered. The different categories of dialogue come together to form a continuous cycle, in which each helped and was helped by another. For example, some of my intrapersonal dialogue either led or pushed me to engage in interpersonal dialogue with others, and then what I learnt from interpersonal dialogue inspired me to continue with my intrapersonal thinking at a higher level. This iterative process kept going in my English academic writing processes. In this sense, interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogue can be seen as interconnected with one another developmentally in English language academic writing.

Another finding from the stories my participants shared with me is concerned with the language that they used when they generated and negotiated their ideas in their English academic writing. I remember in one of my supervision meetings, my supervisor happened to see I used Chinese characters to take notes as we talked, and he asked me why I did this. I said something like: "I use Chinese characters for quick and clear thinking". Ada and Susan reported the same strategy – they employed Chinese characters when working out the outline of their academic writing in English. They too thought it helped in "clarifying thoughts"; sometimes they preferred to "do complicated and deep thinking in Chinese". The use of L1 in our writing concurs with Antón and Dicañilla's (1999) study on the interchanging of L1 and L2 writing, in which they argue that L2 writers produce L1 inner speech as an intrapersonal cognitive tool to generate ideas and regulate thinking activities. The Chinese characters that Ada, Susan and I used in our L2

writing, tended to operate as a mental tool, to mediate and monitor the process of thinking and reflection (Ahmed, 1994).

I want now to briefly discuss the Chinese researcher-writers' participation in dialogic activities related to the written texts they were 'producing' or 'reading'. As "the writing process is dynamic, with the writer and text interacting actively" (Scott, 1996, p. 32), my study shows that dialogue occurs externally (i.e., with others' written/published texts) and internally (in the writer's own written texts). In this respect, I find MacLachlan and Reid's (1994) work on the four kinds of interpretive framing ('circumtextual framing', 'extratextual framing', 'intertextual framing' and 'intratextual framing') that are involved in reading practices as useful for my study of the participants' writing practices. In the following sections, I discuss the 'intertextual' and 'intratextual' dialogue involved in Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing with respect to MacLachlan and Reid's concepts.

#### **10.4 Intertextual dialogue**

According to MacLachlan and Reid (1994), any one text can be 'framed' intertextually by reference to or in relationship with another text/s. As academic writers, postgraduate researchers of any nationality all need to critically engage with a range of written texts, including research literature, conference papers, and research journals, in the process of developing ideas, refining understanding and sometimes generating new knowledge. The case studies from Chapter 5 to Chapter 9 show that the Chinese postgraduate student participants in this study demonstrated some common intertextual dialogue in their writing, and these tended to be "in a generative rather than a simply reproductive way" (Viète & Le Ha, 2007, p. 43). They illustrated how the deeper that the students delved into their postgraduate research studies the less they were satisfied to make connections between their writing and another published text by simply "borrowing" or "copying" either language or ideas from that other text. Rather, they needed to dialogically grapple with ideas from their reading and paraphrase the language, phrases and words used in the other text and to some extent make of this connection a 'new' text. At the same time, they tended to use different strategies to make meaning from engagement with these other texts, especially when the ideas or thinking in the other texts contradicted their own. For instance, Helen spoke about being prompted to re-run the program in the laboratory and Susan tended to talk with colleagues and listen to their opinions.

The narrative cases in Chapters 5 to 9 confirm, again and again, Reid and MacLachan's (1994) view about the potentially interactive and interconnected relationship between academic reading and writing (see also Brittenham & Hoeller, 2004). The participants all told stories about dialogically engaging with a wide range of literature resources with a dual focus: They were certainly interested in the theoretical or academic content of the articles; but they also saw them as worthy examples of successful use of English academic language, which they needed to emulate. For all of them, the primary focus tended to be the academic/research ideas proposed by the authors of their reading literature. Helen described her intertextual dialogue as participating in a form of "battle" between others' ideas and her own. Ada and Shane also reported that they needed to interpret, compare and evaluate the findings within and between different 'other' research texts, which would further inspire them to explore more creative ideas and, at the same time, justify the innovation and appropriateness of their own ideas. The Chinese participants, including me, were involved in a continuous cycle between careful selection of reading resources, thoughtful reading and comprehension of the content, critical analysis and evaluation of the ideas across the reading materials, and dialogical connection of their reading and writing when engaging in intertextual dialogue. Reading and writing for these Chinese participants, as with readers and writers of other nationalities, are reciprocal activities because the outcome of the reading activity might serve as input for writing, and the writing then guides writer to engage in further reading (Grade & Kaplan, 1996). One characteristic of the more successful strategies, was their willingness to purposely place the different texts, and the voices in the different texts, into dialogic interaction with each other. This supports the view that more successful writers are able to dialogically respond to what they have read by placing their own voice in relation to voices from other texts (Bazerman, 2004).

Another goal of intertextual dialogue reported by my participants is concerned with the linguistic perspective. The participants all believed that reading resources were a valuable source for structure, linguistic expression and lexico-grammatical models. However, what they reported shows that at the early stages of their reading and writing, they engaged with language and structure used in the reading texts in a 'less' dialogic way. They were more keen on "rote learning" (死记硬背) of the linguistic expressions from the academics texts they were reading. Ada, Susan and Helen all reported that they deliberately set up one particular stage of reading with most of their attention on "collecting" and "memorizing" terminologies, ideological expressions, and logical structures in academic English language. Helen said she "preferred to

have all linguistic possibilities at hand before writing so that [she] [did] not need to worry about or think about language". Ada also took the attitude of "Yi Lao Yong Yi" (一劳永逸), which means she made a great effort to remember important expressions once and for all, and in so doing avoid future troubles in her written expressions. These views somewhat echo what Pullen and Rhodes (2008) refer to as "hygienic texts", which are washed for the purpose of creating a linear order and "a cleaning up of the other" (p. 247).

However, sooner or later the participants realized this way of learning linguistic elements was not particularly helpful because they discovered there was no fixed and closed language system that included all the linguistic items they would need for their thesis writing. They had to constantly grapple with the choice of linguistic expressions in their English academic writing in order to make meaning and to communicate meaning closely for their readers (Doecke & Parr, 2005). For instance, Ada tried to use "Google translator" as a language aid for her English writing, but she would not just type the Chinese words into it and use the English words it came up with. She carefully weighed up the differences between the optional words she obtained with consideration of the social and cultural context her writing practices were embedded in. She examined the appropriateness of every synonym and 'tried out' each of them. She said it was important to allow herself absolute freedom to change her mind and replace with another optional word at any time during her writing. In this way, stories such as Ada's support Bardoudy's research (2008) that claims writers are capable of selecting relevant linguistic stimuli and reasonably disregarding the inappropriate ones if they have tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty. Therefore, their experience of learning of rhetorical and lexico-grammar information is congruent with Bakhtin's theory about language: "Language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot concept of the world" (Bakhtin, 2000, p. 278). It is highly problematic for L2 writers of academic English to simply or mechanically learn linguistic structures and constructions regardless of the actual social, historical, cultural and institutional contexts within a given discourse community.

My study shows that engaging in dialogue with sample written papers played a critical role in the Chinese students' familiarization with the structure and language valued in their respective disciplines. Helen had carefully selected a research journal, recently judged 'journal of the year' in her area, to be the "template" for her English scholarly writing. She read repeatedly and analyzed the articles in this journal closely, with a particular focus on the writing style, the

organization of each paragraph and commonly-used sophisticated language. However, rather than just monologically and mechanically transferring what she saw in those articles into her writing, Helen tended to analyze in detail the logic behind the organization (in/between sentences and in/between paragraphs) and to look into the contexts of the professional and academic expressions the author used. Helen's intertextual dialogue with the sample journal articles allowed her to understand the norms of the English academic writing in English-speaking academic communities and then become more capable of creating her own writing style. She reported she became a more confident and autonomous English writer by retaining the fluidity and dialogic flow of organizing her thoughts in her writing.

A final example of intertextual dialogue features the participants' engagement in intertextual dialogue and intrapersonal dialogue at the same time with a series of their own drafts. This might have occurred at any time in their writing processes in their ongoing drafting and revising. Helen said that she worked on more than twenty different drafts of each paper she eventually published. The extensive and recursive drafting allowed her to grapple with the ideas she had generated and the language she had used in her English academic writing. She compared, evaluated and connected the ideas between previous drafts. Each draft involved dialogue that eventually produced a 'response' to a previous draft. In this intertextual dialogue, she needed to engage in a form of inner speech through constant negotiation with the ideas and linguistic choices, which led to dialogical movement of position taking and ideas in each of her writing.

### **10.5 Intratextual dialogue**

In addition to engaging in dialogue between various texts that were produced either by others or by the writers themselves, dialogue between elements within a single text being written by the Chinese researcher-writers also played a crucial role in the writing practices that the participants described. What I am calling 'intratextual dialogue' in effect activates potential dialogic relationship between elements of the academic text which the student is working on. This type of dialogue deeply permeated some of the participants' writing experiences (e.g., Shane's, Ada's, and Susan's), especially in their planning stages. In most cases, the participants' experiences of intratextual dialogue associated with their writing texts was influenced by and interrelated to their intrapersonal dialogue with respect to their thinking in their writing practices. Therefore, as with the other categories of dialogue I am discussing in this chapter, it seems that there was some potential overlap between these two types of dialogue.



Both Ada and Susan reported that they engaged in intratextual dialogue as they sketched out an outline (using dot points) of their proposed academic writing. Dialogically grappling with the dot points in this outline sometimes involved experimenting with the relationship between one idea in one part of the piece they were writing and another idea in another part of that writing. This kind of dialogue with dot points in their English academic writing often led to a change in the order of ideas, and sometimes the addition or deletion of ideas. They explained that such a process helped them to develop better writing fluency and clarity. Ada's and Susan's practices of developing their ideas is supported in a study by Galbraith et al. (2005), which found that outlining (such as using dot points) allows more attention to be devoted to the order and structure of ideas. More importantly, the intratextual dialogue that the participants from my study engaged in when outlining their ideas could inspire and prompt them to generate new ideas that were associated with previous ideas. While not stating it in so many words, Ada and Susan appreciated the dialogical potential of outlining in generating ideas as well as the sequencing of these ideas, which further positively affected the quality of their English academic writing (Rijlaarsdam & Van den Bergh, 2006).

This study found that intertextual dialogue was often used in a recursive and iterative way during the planning and revision stages. For example, Shane planned his written text at the argument/ideas level first, and then at the paragraph level and lastly at the sentence level. He reported that he often changed "the order of ideas" in his writing until they were positioned "logically" and "appropriately". Shane's ongoing dialogic negotiation and reworking of ideas aligns with Larrain and Haye's (2013) ideas about the dialogical movement of position taking in composing as a result of appreciating differences and relatedness. With considerable time and effort put into the planning stage, Shane felt he did not make significant changes to the main ideas/arguments when later drafting or composing his work. The main goal of the revision for him tended to be concerned with how to clearly convey his meaning to his audience. He then moved around the sentences or even paragraphs in his draft to make his writing more fluent and to cater for what he anticipated to be his English-speaking readers' "thinking styles" and "expectations". In this way, Shane wrote with potential readers in his mind, an example of what Bakhtin (1986) would call 'addressivity' (p. 95).

I also used intratextual dialogue when I was writing about this discussion chapter. Due to the complicated and interconnected relationship between these four categories of dialogue, sometimes it was difficult to work out the most suitable category for participants' different

writing practices. I had to move an idea around among these four categories of dialogue by looking into the relationships between the idea I wanted to discuss and the particular category of dialogue. Sometimes, I had to try positioning the idea into all of the four sections until I worked out its best position in my writing by relating it to the other ideas in each section to ensure my writing's clarity and fluency. Both Shane's and my experiences of intratextual dialogue in our English academic writing support Bakhtin's (1981) idea that writing should not be undertaken in pursuit of some ideal, neat and tidy format. Our practices of intratextual dialogue could be seen in our ongoing wrestling with the relations between the choice of ideas and linguistic expressions in writing (Shane's writing), and the position of them in the writing (my thesis writing).

## **10.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Chinese postgraduate students moved back and forward between the four categories of dialogue I have proposed in this chapter, as they developed their academic writing. Most of the Chinese researcher-writers in this study showed an increased awareness of and appreciation for recursive and iterative practices in the journey of undertaking and completing a piece of English academic writing the further they progressed in their candidature.

In a sense this chapter presents not just four different categories of dialogic writing practices, but a picture of a complex relationship between the different categories of dialogue utilized by the Chinese postgraduate writers. In effect, the most dialogic writing practices shows the writer researchers creating a flexible space that allows them to grapple with and negotiate their language, content and style. Rather than being inhibited by a forward linear writing path, the narrative cases in Chapters 5 to 9 illustrate how some of the Chinese students moved between four categories of dialogue when engaging in English writing to develop, expand and clarify their ideas. For example, when Shane was involved in intertextual dialogue with "thousands of journals", he kept taking notes about his new ideas inspired by his reading (intrapersonal dialogue). He preferred to discuss with his supervisor from time to time about his notes (interpersonal dialogue), and their communication tended to guide and provoke his further reading (intertextual dialogue) and thinking (intrapersonal dialogue). In this way, different categories of dialogue took place at various points in his English scholarly writing. The dynamic movement between different categories of dialogue the participants experienced

helped them to be comfortable with the ambiguities and the complexities of English academic writing.

## **Chapter 11 Inner Dialogue, Cultural Hybridity and Heteroglossia**

### **11.1 Introduction**

In this second discussion chapter, I address the second and the third research questions of my study: (2) What factors influence and mediate Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing practices? And (3) How do Chinese postgraduate students negotiate their researcher-writer identities in English academic writing? An initial reading of the narrative cases I presented in Chapters 5 to 9 reveals several levels of convergence but also divergence with regard to the participants' experiences of identity negotiation in English academic writing. To identify the levels of convergence and divergence across cases, I read the interview transcripts multiple times, noting similarities and differences, and ultimately identified three key themes that encompassed the complexity I observed there:

1. Generating and managing the inner dialogue between Chinese and English writing practices;
2. Researcher-writer identity work;
3. Factors mediating researcher-writer identity work

Using these themes to anchor my exploration, I then began to investigate how, and to what extent, the cases could be understood as dialogically interconnecting with each other. I begin this first section of the chapter by examining the nature of the inner dialogue associated with the bringing together of the Chinese writing practices and English writing practices of my participants and myself.

### **11.2 Generating and managing inner dialogue between Chinese and English writing practices**

All participants, including myself, grew up and experienced most of our school education in China where Chinese language (Mandarin) was the only official language. Not surprisingly, we all had extensive experience of writing in Chinese before beginning our PhDs or Masters' degrees in Australia, and we all felt this influenced our English academic writing. The narrative cases in Chapters 5 to 9 reveal how, on the one hand, many of us were able to positively transfer some Chinese writing strategies into our English academic writing practices in ways that might seem to be straightforward. For example, Shane spoke of using a multi-staged planning strategy to help him organise his ideas in his English academic writing, just as he had done when writing

in Chinese. Helen described the self-checklists she created, using PowerPoint slides, to enhance efficiency and clarity when revising her writing. On the other hand, we felt – as Connor (1996) and Yabarra (2001) have also found – that in most cases our previous Chinese writing practices tended to bring about much confusions and negative experience in our efforts to grapple with the challenges of scholarly writing in English. I firstly discuss this from the perspective of the influence of Chinese linguistic and rhetorical styles on English scholarly writing practices.

### **11.2.1 The influence of Chinese linguistic features**

In this section, I consider the influence of Chinese linguistic features on the way we postgraduate researcher-writers managed sentence structure, word choice, and the use of metaphor/idiom in our English academic writing. Firstly, the most obvious differences between Chinese and English semiotic symbols (which we might also call linguistic features) at the sentence level prompted most study participants to be cautious about making any direct transfer of their Chinese writing ‘styles’ or practices into their English scholarly writing. Shane, Susan, and Ada all referred to their tendency to consciously or unconsciously construct long and complicated sentences in their English scholarly writing as they had done in their previous Chinese writing, and indeed they offered scholarly rationales for this style. Ada expressed a preference for long sentences “as they allow [her] to put lots of details and descriptions in a sentence”. Susan said that “complicated sentences give readers an impression of outstanding academic qualities”. Similarly, Shane thought “the use of long sentences makes [his] ideas more attractive and professional”.

These students reported that they encountered some criticism of this kind of sentence structure either from their supervisors or from journal reviewers. However, they responded to it with varied attitudes and practices. Shane confessed that he began to be impressed by the potential of “short and powerful” sentences, and was in the process of a seemingly smooth transition to writing with these kinds of syntactical structures. While Shane expressed his growing appreciation of the use of short sentence structure, Susan and Ada were not convinced of the merits of this style of sentence structure. Susan and Ada struggled to transform their well-developed practices of constructing long and complex sentences into short and succinct ones, possibly because they were not convinced of the value of this in their writing and/or because of what they saw as their limited English language proficiency. This suggests the change was not a merely mechanical adjustment in style. In some cases, the negative experience of trying but ‘failing’ to negotiate a culturally acceptable style with regard to the length of sentences

caused them to lose confidence (Susan) or it dampened their previous enjoyment of writing (Ada) (cf. Burke, 2010).

Also, Shane reported that he was not good at using particular connectives – either individual words, such as “therefore”, “however”, or phrases, such as “although....” – because he believed Chinese writers are more concerned to connect sentences by their ideas rather than such words or phrases, and that this resulted in a smoother and more coherent flow of argument. I also faced these challenges when I began to explore and experiment with scholarly/academic writing practices in English. In the early stages of my postgraduate study in English (and still now), I needed to keep reminding myself of the value of using a range of conjunctive vocabulary that could enhance the coherence of my sentences. I had never been aware of using linking characters in my Chinese writing, which Yang and Sun (2011) point out is quite common.

Another dimension of the contrasts between Chinese semiotic symbols and writing practices or those in English relates to what the interviewees referred to as “flowery”, “fancy” and “fresh” images, metaphors or lexical choices in their Chinese writing. For instance, in the early stages of Susan’s doctoral study in Australia, she had sought to transfer this kind of language into English scholarly writing, as she believed that this would be a way of showing her extensive English language skills and vocabulary (Kirkpatrick, 1997). However, what Susan described as her “poetic” written discourse was in most cases not welcomed by her supervisor and other academic reviewers. Traditional Chinese writing conventions value indirectness and emotion, which shows in Susan’s language style, however, western scholars tend to value straightforwardness and linear logic in their written scholarly texts (Sohn, 1983). When she was confronted with a confusing mixture of expectations/requirements, Susan was challenged to balance the use of this sophisticated or poetic discourse with more widely acceptable academic discourses when writing in English.

In fact, Ada and I both liked incorporating Chinese idioms and proverbs into our English scholarly writing, but our supervisors were not so quick to reject such writing. Ada believed ‘playing’ with some Chinese idioms allowed her to accurately express her thoughts. In some respects, the wider variety of epistemological traditions in the discipline of Education – in which we were both researching at the time of the study’s interviews – was more likely to accept such language than the disciplines in which the other participants were studying. Ada’s

concern was how to translate these Chinese idioms in her writing in ways that were not just tolerated but appreciated by readers. Translating idioms that are culturally situated, in academic or non-academic writing (Liu, 2012) remained a challenge for Ada, as it does for me too. My early attempts to translate Chinese idioms into ‘correct’ English were often somewhat mechanical, assisted by electronic and hard copy dictionaries, and almost invariably the resulting translation would be a weaker or less rich sense of the original Chinese meaning. It was not enough to take into account the Chinese meanings of characters and words; to fully grasp the meaning I needed to translate cultural settings and practices as part of this process. Both Ada and I struggled, and continue to struggle, to work out a mediated linguistic and cultural academic space that is acceptable to English readers and to ourselves, as writers and scholars.

There is a sense in which these participants’ experiences of writing in English necessarily involved distinctive forms of negotiating cultural and linguistic differences in an Australian academic context. I would not want to underestimate this aspect of my reading of the cases. However, there is also a sense that a dimension of this negotiation between cultural and linguistic differences can be seen as congruent with Bakhtin’s dialogic understandings of *all* communication in language and writing. Language and communication, for Bakhtin (1984), are a function of tensions between multiple dynamic influences stemming from the network of inter-connected personal, social, cultural, linguistic and ideological relationships. Therefore, the process of making meaning in and with language, no matter the cultural or linguistic background of the writing, needs to continuously involve the writer in constructing a voice and an identity by acting on and transforming a given language while actively negotiating the cultural, linguistic and ideological dissonances among the other voices and identities. This is where the notion of heteroglossia appears to be apt in explaining this negotiation. The five narrative cases show these Chinese researcher-writers felt the need to be linguistically and culturally ‘flexible’ and ‘open-minded’, prepared to make changes in their efforts to express ideas and knowledge in English scholarly language. In effect, they/we need to create a dialogic space to grapple with those differences with an unbiased attitude, not being too quick to favour or reject one option or another, if the imperative is to assimilate into what the participants almost always spoke of as a ‘new’ (for them) academic, cultural and social environment.

### 11.2.2 The influence of Chinese rhetorical styles

I now wish to turn to a second main theme that emerged in the participants' discussion of their struggles in developing the necessary lexical and syntactic styles required for academic writing in English. They tended to talk about this in terms of what I describe as Chinese writers' native-cultural rhetorical styles and the problems this posed for them as writers. Some of the relevant literature in this area refers to the culture of collectivism and indirectness associated with traditional Chinese writing (e.g., Kaplan, 1972; Hinkel, 1997; Yang, 2001). In this respect, the participants related experience of confusion and even embarrassment as they struggled to deal with western culture's expectations, which they saw as so different from those of China. All of participants reported that their early attempts to grapple with the differences in genre, in structure of texts, and in the use of logic and rhetorical strategies, made them feel inferior and less competitive (in the academic 'game') compared with native speaking English academics and writers. In that sense, their experience appeared to correspond to that of Chinese students reported in studies by Xu (2012) in English speaking countries, where Chinese students felt challenged to adjust to the social and academic context in Canada due to differences in writing conventions and cultures.

In Helen's case, her preferred writing style in both Chinese and English was to be "modest", "indirect", and to adopt what Shen (1989) refers to as a "bush-clearing" pattern (p. 463). Given the choice, Helen thought "it was appropriate to leave some space for audience [interpretation] rather than completely explaining everything straightaway". Ada believed that "it is polite and human to offer some positive comments on one's work before bringing up the criticism in academic writing". Susan was in favour of using different kinds of metaphors in her English writing to describe something more "vividly" and "give readers some space for imagination". And yet she was conscious that she tended to overuse this strategy, as the use of metaphor can open up multiple meanings of any statement, and this can be unhelpful in academic writing if all relevant meanings do not work to mutually reinforce each other (Xu, 2012). To an extent, the above stories of L2 English academic writing might be seen to support the view of some researchers (e.g. Ballard & Clanchy, 1991) that there exist certain culturally-specific rhetorical styles that seriously complicate academic writing across different languages and cultures. Also, their framing of their pre-existing writing styles is in line with the view that Chinese students have established particular thought patterns, as proposed by Xu (2012), and these thought patterns carry a combination of characteristics including imagery, subjectivity, collective culture, and cyclic forms of logic.



While there were similarities in the ways all participants perceived differences in cultural rhetorical styles, our attitudes and strategies to negotiate these differences were not always the same. For instance, Susan preferred to keep a sense of Chinese rhetorical style in her English scholarly writing as much as possible, as she was more comfortable and confident about writing in this way. She hoped that her readers would appreciate her style. This is despite the fact that sometimes she received negative comments on her ‘inappropriate’ use of rhetorical methods. In contrast, although Shane claimed he enjoyed ‘playing’ with language in his writing in the interview, he later tried to downplay his cultural rhetorical styles on several occasions.

In my early academic writing as a Chinese student researcher, I was very concerned about giving my readers the impression that I might be disrespectful and boastful in scholarly writing if I wrote using linear logic, drawing attention to my own context as a writer or seeking to write objectively (like much English academic writing). I was aware that Chinese students have our own ways of showing respect for and communicating with our audiences. This belief is consistent with Hinds’ (1987) argument, which highlights that eastern writing tends to be influenced by a more “reader-responsible” language that assumes readers are able to grasp the writers’ meanings and interpret them in a similar way to their own. Therefore, writers do not have to explain their ideas straightforwardly and specifically. The more that I have read and written in English, though, the more I have come to appreciate that rhetorical styles in English writing are by no means fixed or rigid (Street, 1999). Indeed, in some traditions within my own discipline of Education, different rhetorical strategies are welcomed as they can contribute to the dynamism or engaging nature of English academic writing (Parr, Doecke & Bulfin, 2015). However, there is no doubt that I, like many of the other participants in my study, would struggle with the process of becoming an academic writer in English, if I remained overly attached to lexical or syntactic styles of writing that had been formed in a previous writing experience, without proper consideration of the new sociocultural academic settings. For Susan, especially, it would seem that such attachment tended to exacerbate the confusion and misunderstandings she experienced early in her postgraduate study in Australia.

As I discussed in my Literature Review chapters (Chapter 2 and 3), Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of dialogue, in its richest conception, is composed of a heteroglossia of voices in each act of communication in a particular sphere. Successful communication requires writer and audience, speaker and respondent, all potentially diverse voices, to interact with each other in dynamic ways. In this sense, rather than merely focusing on the “simultaneity” of self and other (Iddings,

Haught, & Devlin, 2005), the more successful stories from the Chinese researcher-writers in my study showed themselves to be actively engaged in a kind of dialogic tussle between self and other by imagining our readers' social and cultural backgrounds, exploring and experimenting with the possible adaptations, and negotiating differences and conflicts along the way. In this way, our stories speak of a writer working towards a dynamic sense of self/s and cultures, so that our writing maintains characteristics that resist cultural or linguistic stereotypes.

Put simply, Chinese and English, as two different languages, have multiple differences in terms of semiotic, linguistic and rhetorical features. Another way of expressing the struggles that the participants and I have engaged with, and are engaged with, is to see Chinese students as negotiating dilemmas and conflicting cultural or academic views, and generating a sense of hybrid textual styles, which reflect the heteroglossia or multivoicedness of all language (Bakhtin, 1981; 1986). How each of us solved these problems, as discussed in the following section, is bound up with our researcher-writer identity work in our English academic writing.

### **11.3 Researcher-writer identity work**

I now turn my attention to the identity work of my participants, with a focus on how the Chinese researcher-writers in this study spoke about developing and negotiating their/our identities as writers and researchers.

Based on the feedback that the participants obtained from their supervisors and other proof-readers regarding their language style in English scholarly writing, it is evident that their writing in academic communities was mostly judged by western writing criteria and rhetorical value systems. This can result in more challenges and difficulties for Chinese students, as they needed to engage with and make meaning of academic content while simultaneously managing assessment and rhetorical standards designed by English native speakers. In dealing with the differences between English and Chinese writing practices, all Chinese students who participated in this study reported that our first concern was how to develop our voice as a Chinese research student, in the course of learning English writing conventions and styles in Australia. In Bakhtin's (1986) terms, a writer needs to "enter into [the writing], forgetting one's own and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture" (pp. 6-7).

In different ways, we all claimed to have learnt about the ‘distance’ between the prevailing ideologies in our first culture and those in the new target culture and we spoke of developing strategies for navigating or negotiating that distance. This was done by: discussing writing with student peers and academic colleagues (Susan and myself); talking with a supervisor (Ada and myself); and engaging in extensive reading and writing (Helen, Shane and myself). These kinds of strategies reflect Bloome et al.’s (2005) argument, that literacy learning is a complex sociocultural process involving enculturation, power relations and identity development (see also Gee, 2000). Based on these different attitudes, understandings and practices about how to develop writer identities in English writing, I now discuss the participants’ cases with respect to the following two identity themes: (i) ‘accommodating’ western ideologies and practices; and (ii) creating dialogic hybrid spaces for academic and cultural identity work.

### **11.3.1 ‘Accommodating’ western ideologies and practices**

I have chosen to focus on Helen and Shane in this section because although they had different experiences in carrying out their identity work, they shared beliefs and strategies in this regard. They took the “accommodation” strategy, defined by Chase (1988, cited in Ivanič, 1998) as “the process by which students learn to accept conventions without necessarily questioning how these conventions privilege some forms of knowledge at the expense of others” (p. 92). Helen and Shane reported having tried their best to become acquainted with the privileged discourse and language style as well as their supervisors’ preferences in Australia (see Abasi et al., 2006). It seems that their understanding of what is privileged in western academic writing prompted them to feel they were in some ways “inferior” and “limited” in their English writing due to their language proficiency and native cultural rhetoric. This had an influence on their identity work, in that they felt compelled to “value”, “follow” and “imitate” what they saw as western writing styles and customs. In this sense, their experiences correspond to the observations of some Australian educators (e.g., Devos, 2003; Marlina, 2007) that non-English writers frequently construct deficit values of themselves as thinkers and writers in English.

For example, although Helen was passionate about Chinese culture and liked reading in Chinese, she believed that “Chinese identity has nothing to do with [her] English scholarly writing”. For her, quality English academic writing needed to be objective, impersonal, and analytical. In order to adjust to a western educational context, Helen always reminded herself of the need to acquire and apply the characteristics of dominant western academic, linguistic and rhetorical conventions while doing her best to discard or hide her Chinese rhetorical styles

in her English written products. The optimal form of English academic writing in her mind was the “locally standard way of writing”. In effect, Helen felt she needed to ignore and hide what Gee (2000) would call her inner core of identity. Helen’s identity work can be described as constructing a sense of herself that would satisfy a specific group of English readers who she saw as important to her academic success.

Shane also spoke of keeping in mind the importance of acculturating himself into a western discourse community as much as possible. He aligned himself with his notion of western writing conventions by making many changes in terms of the length of sentences, the use of the rhetorical styles, the use of fresh vocabulary and expressive phrasing, to cater for the tastes and preferences of his English-speaking readers, including his supervisor and his academic colleagues. He admitted that “I could not find myself in my English writing because my current writing style is no style”. It could be argued that this is perhaps the strongest critique one could make of one’s writing style – that is to say, there is nothing distinctive about it. However, unlike Helen, Shane aspired toward being able to write “correctly, clearly, and accurately”, but also communicating his Chinese researcher-writer’s identity. “That would be my ideal English writing capability, but apparently I am far from there yet,” he said. In this sense, although Shane altered much to adapt himself to a new writing cultural landscape, he was reluctant to completely hide his cultural and academic identity as a Chinese researcher-writer.

My portraits of Helen’s and Shane’s experiences here appear to be completely different from those experiences of ESL students reported in Zhao, Fei and Lin’s study (2013). According to Zhao et al., ESL students who are able to ‘cross’ between cultures and become proficient in both home and target language and discourses should be viewed as gaining or enriching their sense of culture rather than losing or substituting one culture for another. Helen and Shane spoke of struggling to establish an appropriate researcher-writer identity that took account of the reader, her/his professor and the sociocultural context in which they were writing and researching. Like the participants in Zhao et al.’s (2013) study, both Helen and Shane reported that they had acquired English language and writing conventions well; however, they chose to ‘cross’ between two cultures by trying to immerse themselves in the host culture in order to ‘get the best out of it’. This approach seems to indicate that they paid particular attention to the context in which they were writing. Nevertheless, they were inclined to under-appreciate the ways in which the context of writing can significantly influence the interaction between a writer and a particular group of readers. In fact, the kinds of ‘bearing in mind’ that Helen and Shane

were doing were also concerned with the choice of conventions, genres, or styles of English resulting from the influence of different discourse communities and culture (cf. Hyland, 2003, p. 26). Thus, to some extent, their inclination to accommodate western ideologies and practices confirms the influence of Chinese culture on Chinese students' L2 writing discussed in the Literature Review chapters, which emphasizes the interdependent relationship among individuals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). At the risk of invoking cultural stereotypes, my study suggests that sometimes, at least, Chinese postgraduate students were reluctant to draw attention to their individuality, and they strove to become a part of an encompassing social relationship in their writing.

### **11.3.2 Creating dialogic hybrid spaces for academic and cultural identity work**

These following portraits of English academic writing of Chinese postgraduate students in Australia draw in particular on the stories of Ada, Susan and myself. While the three of us spoke and wrote of striving to write in English appropriately and academically in our respective areas, we showed some inclination to resist what I call the 'lure of assimilation' into the target discourse. Rather, in distinctive but also similar ways we attempted to create a culturally dialogic writer identity, referencing what we saw as our cultural heritage. At the same time, we were strategically speaking to our understandings of the ideologies in the host country by making a conscious effort to grapple with an in-between "third space" (Bhabha, 1994) of the two sets of cultures, Chinese and Australian/western.

Ada, as an experienced English writer, expressed that she appreciated the differences between her English writing and that of others, but she referred in animated terms to the danger of "being brainwashed" (洗脑) and she believed she actively resisted this in her writing. Ada was eager to have some freedom in her English academic writing by challenging what she saw as rules and conventions in lexical, syntactical and discourse terms which were different from that of her native language writing. However, when her perception of 'Chinese elements' in her English writing compromised meaning-making and understanding in an academic context, she made significant changes. In such situations, she was prepared to sacrifice her Chinese style of English writing to some extent. However, she felt by doing this she was formulating another but still authentic voice in her English scholarly writing. Ada endeavored to develop her researcher-writer identity through the content she had written, suggesting that it is possible to separate the 'style' of her writing from the academic 'content' of that writing. As her research

area was concerned with political and educational policies in China and western countries, she tended to take advantage of her Chinese background to discuss these issues from a Chinese researcher's angle in her scholarly writing. I, too, have attempted a similar strategy in my research to maintain connections with, and perhaps the integrity of, my cultural identity as a Chinese researcher-writer. This is one of the reasons behind my presenting autobiographical narratives at different times in this thesis (Preamble and Chapter 5), which were based on raw data in the form of reflections initially written in my research journal. By doing this, I want to present and reflexively inquire into my experiences of writing in English and in Chinese, and to subject this writing to explicit scrutiny as I consider the identity work I am engaged in even as I write my own PhD.

Susan appeared to be resistant to the lure of assimilation into the dominant English academic conventions and discourses. She had explained her resistance partly as resulting from her deep passion for "the beauty" of the Chinese language, and partly because of her reluctance to "waive" Chinese cultural traits in her English writing. In her interviews with me, she said that she encountered a clash of two cultures, and this clashing often confused, embarrassed, and annoyed her. Her reaction was to develop her own "comfortable zone" which gave her a space in which she could maintain some of her preferred Chinese writing style while making some adaptations to cater for traditional western academic writing and learning practices and expectations. In so doing, she felt she did not simply 'give up' her Chinese culture and linguistic identity. At the same time, she could not afford to be totally dismissive or disrespectful of English academic discourses and practices because she knew she had to ensure her English writing could clearly and effectively convey meanings to English speaking western readers. In her writing practices, she was conscious of the dialogic process of negotiation, selecting appropriate word choice, fluent phrasing of sentences and achieving the right lexical nuance by considering her intercultural background. She often reflected critically on her previous learning and writing practices and used this reflection as part of her ongoing identity work, where she was building a culturally rich and appropriate academic identity in her English writing.

Ada's, Susan's and my own experiences are congruent with how Kramsch (1993) describes L2 learners, who feel "forever betwixt and between, no longer at home in their original culture, nor really belonging to the host culture" (p. 234). The stories of our ongoing identity work, how we grappled with different cultures in English scholarly writing, align with Bakhtin's

(1981) philosophy about writing which regards the most meaningful writing as dialogic in nature. As researcher-writers, most participants in my study appreciated the need to be tolerant and critical, as well as open-minded and creative, and to manage the heteroglossia of voices in their writing. Keeping in mind the differences in the writing practices in the two languages, they were often shuttling between two cultural spaces, moving back and across boundaries between two languages and cultures. They were aware of the need to take ownership of their English writing by “conscious hybridization” (Bakhtin, 1968). To varying extents, they created for themselves a “third space” (Bhabha, 1994) and entered into this space in a “lively” way (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 54) in their English academic writing.

The literature of a ‘third space’ suggests it is subject to instability and fracturing (Bhabha, 1994; Moje, Ciechamowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004). Reflecting on the participants’ narrative cases, it appears they had come to see this space as a comfortable space, and to varying extents they welcomed its ambiguities, compromises, and negotiations as crucial parts of the intellectual work of bilingual, transcultural researcher-writers. The space requires an open mind and a non-discriminatory and respectful attitude towards difference. In this space, the cases suggest, Chinese postgraduate writers can write in English with some freedom, knowing that they are continuing their identity work as researchers just as monolingual Australian postgraduate students are engaged in ongoing identity work as they engage in the demanding academic challenges of, for example, completing a PhD. In this way, Chinese postgraduate researcher-writers can be seen as actively engaged in ongoing dialogic negotiation in this space of in-between-ness, simultaneously entering another culture while remaining outside it, engaged in their own forms of ideological, cultural and academic ‘becoming’ as they complete their postgraduate degrees in Australia.

### **11.4 Factors mediating the researcher-writer’s identity work**

The lively variation between these Chinese postgraduate students’ experiences of identity work, as discussed in the section above, appears to be illustrative of the diversity of Chinese students who study abroad, at least as those experiences represented in the literature. Therefore, the encompassing label of ‘Chinese international student’ can be understood as deriving from a limited and monologic understanding of Chinese students and what might be called their cultural identity. In fact, there is a range of different factors that help explain how these students negotiated their cultural and academic identity in the process of developing their academic writing in English. I have argued that developing academic writing practices in English is best

seen as embedded in a complicated social, cultural, and academic context that is influenced by the writer's cultural identity. In order to clarify the dialogic insights when culturally different students enter western academic institutions, in the following section, I enact an investigation into many possible factors that mediate Chinese students' developing researcher-writer identities. I structure my investigation into two provisionally separable perspectives: (i) non-academic voices and perspectives; and (ii) academic voices and perspectives. Under each perspective, I develop a range of themes. At the end of this section, I also discuss the dialogic connections between these perspectives.

#### **11.4.1 'Non-academic' voices and perspectives**

In this section, I discuss two themes concerned with how my participants negotiated their researcher-writer identity: their personalities and personal qualities (cf. Donath, 2014) and their cultural background.

##### ***How personal qualities influence researcher-writer identity work***

The first theme related to Chinese postgraduate students' researcher-writer identity work is concerned with personal qualities. The narrative cases in Chapters 5 to 9 show that one important factor influencing Chinese students' negotiation with their researcher-writer identity is the distinctive quality of their character, or what Donath (2014) calls "personality". From the interview data, it is evident that all participants have different personal characteristics and qualities, and that these individual characteristics mediate the negotiation of their researcher-writer identity in their English academic writing. Therefore, it is to some extent consistent with previous findings that show there is an intimate relationship between personality and students' sense of belonging in an additional culture (Li, 2005).

In one interview, Shane said that he had been curious about what happened in the "real English world". When he was in China, he preferred to read English magazines and watch English movies because he admired the English language for its "beauty" and "logics". He thought the English language could describe things more accurately. When he started to write in academic English in Australia, he tended to focus on "absorbing" the "beauty" of the English language in learning to write in English. He was less concerned about showing "Chinese cultural elements" in his English writing. His 'curious' nature encouraged him to devote most of his attention to achieving an "English writing style" which was different from what he used to do.



Ada, too, claimed that she was looking forward to having freedom in her English academic writing. She understood that sometimes she had to compromise her English writing in terms of style, but what I interpret as her ‘fighting spirit’ allowed her to insist on developing her space and voice in English academic writing in her own way. Helen also had a ‘fighting spirit’, but it was directed in different ways. She concentrated all her efforts on achieving her academic goals. Therefore, in attempting to reach her goal of “localizing” her English writing, she used different strategies to learn and imitate in order to write in what she saw as the style of a native English-speaking scholar. She would not let concerns of her cultural identity influence her English academic writing. In a different way again, Susan was ‘outgoing’ and ‘adventurous’. She described her approach as “plung[ing] into” her English writing from time to time. For example, she would boldly experiment with some Chinese metaphors in her English writing to make it more distinctive. The cases indicate that all the postgraduate students’ different personal qualities contributed to the different ways in which they negotiated being accepted in English academic writing communities.

### ***How cultural background influences researcher-writer identity work***

The second theme in this section is concerned with cultural discourse/s. I have argued that researcher-writer identity work inevitably references the individual’s cultural heritage, and also his/her understanding of the ideologies in the host culture (Li, 2007). Thus, my analysis of the participants’ awareness of self in English academic writing is unavoidably associated with the notion of identity in Confucian terms (Gui, 2009). According to Tweed and Lehman (2002), “Confucius was humanistic and sought to achieve societal harmony by encouraging virtuous activity” (p. 89). In others words, a Confucian view is that an individual is born into a web of social relationships, which require obedience to rituals in order to achieve a degree of harmony. My participants preferred to follow conventions of ‘the mainstream’, more or less. Most of them, when writing in English, felt uncomfortable to ‘swim against the tide’ when establishing their writer identity in English writing. Shane explained that “every society has a main trend of behavioral codes. I want to make everyone happy by following its conventions”. Shane, Ada and Helen reported that conforming to conventions in Australian institutions helped them to effectively integrate into western academic culture. In contrast, Susan appreciated that the social values in Australia are different from these of China. Rather than encouraging conformity (which she felt was prevalent in China), she believed that western social values appreciate innovation and critical thinking. Thus, she learned to be critical and develop

ownership of her English written texts by adapting her writing styles while not giving up her innovative thoughts.

These Chinese postgraduate students' negotiation of their researcher-writer identity was also influenced by the structure of social interaction, which according to Confucius is hierarchical – the Confucian view is that each individual needs to behave according to their proper position in the pre-established social pyramid (Confucian Analects, 1998). When my participants were confronted with forming their English writing style in an English-speaking country and choosing the appropriate 'variety' of English, as Kachru (1986) calls it, it appears that the Confucian notion of "rules of conduct" inevitably affected their approaches. For example, Shane believed that "English-speaking people created and developed the English language and culture, so they must have the authority of this language". Helen also reported that she found local western people could invariably use the English language more accurately. These two participants' dominant feelings about "Inner Circle" English align with Jordao's (2009) findings that 'Inner Circle' countries enjoy the ownership of English language and see non-native English as deficient.

#### **11.4.2 'Academic' voices and perspectives**

I will next discuss the participants' identity negotiation from an academic perspective. The following themes are included in this perspective: their English education in China; their English language proficiency; the academic discipline within which they research; the expectations of their supervisors/teachers; and their anticipation/expectations of potential readers.

##### ***How students' English education in China influences researcher-writer identity work***

As stated earlier, all of us Chinese participants in this study undertook our early education in China before we came to Australia. Susan, Shane and I completed Bachelor's degrees in China; Ada and Helen completed their Master's degrees in China before pursuing academic degrees in Australian universities. The narrative cases show the range of ways in which our negotiation of our researcher-writer identity were influenced by our previous English learning experiences in China.

As one of the compulsory subjects in the Chinese education system, English study was (and remains) of paramount national importance in China. It is viewed as a priority for socio-

economic development. Therefore, competence in English, to a large extent, is regarded as a technical skill to underpin China's quest for modernization through social and global engagement (Zhao & Huang, 2010). In interviews, the participants in my study drew attention to the fact that English was taught in China under the guidance of a nationally unified syllabus and examinational system. Chinese students have to pass a range of national English exams, such as the College Entrance Exam, College English Test – 4 (CET-4), and CET - 6 produced by Chinese National College English Testing Committee to graduate from secondary school/university or to qualify for further study. The pedagogy for English teachers in China tends to focus on the acquisition of grammar and skills required for these exams (Ai, 2015).

Although grammar-oriented approaches have been criticized by many educators (e.g., Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Dannels, 2003), this technical delivery of English language education has tended to result in a technical and 'practical' understanding of English study which neglects students' individual backgrounds and interests (Zhao, Fei & Lin, 2013). The practical or pragmatic orientation of English education – 'studying for exams' – also affected the participants' views of English writing when we commenced our postgraduate education in Australia. For example, Helen believed that English scholarly writing was irrelevant to her attempts to establish her identity in her academic work: "My purpose of English academic writing is to build up my international reputation in my research area... To do this, I need to publish more paper in English". Susan also mentioned that her main goals for writing were for "completing [her] academic degrees, producing more publications, and later successfully starting [her] career in Australia". In order to achieve her academic and professional goals, she did not mind sacrificing her personal voice and cultural identity to some extent. Although Ada had attempted to present a sense of national and cultural voice in her PhD thesis, she was also willing to compromise her Chinese cultural identity (for example, she sometimes tried to hide some of what she thought of as her original writing style, which was influenced by Chinese writing styles) in order to publish her research writing in a scholarly journal in Australia or internationally. These experiences support Gee's (2000) theorizing of identity, which emphasizes the ways in which identity exists in continuous and dynamic tension between self-understanding and social recognition in a given social context. For instance, according to Gee (1999), language learners need to use different styles of language to enact and recognize different identities in different settings. When these Chinese research students were writing in English in Australian institutions, they felt they needed to adopt the language style that was acceptable in this context in order to socialize into scholarly debates in their field. They needed

to create a balance in developing their cultural identity and their academic identity, although of course the separation between these two concepts is not at all clear.

Gui's (2009) arguments help make sense of the identity work of the narrative cases presented in Chapters 5 to 9, as he points out that English education in China "serves the personal utilitarian purposes and is a pragmatic asset" (p. 54). When Chinese students write in English in an academic context, he says, it steers them towards meeting immediate needs, such as lexical and syntactic choices in writing, in order to complete their academic writing tasks (see also Costino & Hyon, 2011). He believes this pragmatic perspective on English study in turn influences how Chinese students position themselves in their English academic writing. Such was the case for some of the participants in this study. For them, English writing is often a matter of putting English sentences together and following certain English grammar rules to achieve pragmatic purposes.

### ***How English language proficiency influences researcher-writer identity work***

English language proficiency is another important factor affecting how the majority of the Chinese students in this study developed and grappled with their researcher-writers' identities in English scholarly writing. Their interview and questionnaire responses show that their primary concern was their English language proficiency, particularly regarding the choice of words, the construction of sentences, and the use of rhetorical strategies. Some participants said, "I am confident about my grammar capability" (Shane), or "I believe I have accumulated a considerable vocabulary size" (Helen), but they remained concerned about the "accuracy" of their language in their English writing. Ada said she could not figure out the nuances of the words, which often impacted the accuracy of her written language. Helen admired "local people's use of short and direct English sentences to express themselves". She further commented that if she could have learnt English "in an authentic English-speaking environment", she might better be able to do this. Ada's and Helen's experiences appeared to confirm the drawbacks of grammar-oriented approaches to English learning (Dannesi, 2003). Only focusing on skills acquisition, such as coding and decoding, cannot guarantee that a writer will be able to solve all problems arising from their writing and meaning making processes (Locke, 2005). One important dimension of developing academic writing involves learning to understand and respond to the complexities, challenges and diversities of the writing context. This idea echoes sociocultural approaches to language which recognize literacy as a set of social or cultural practices, in other words, the practices related to social, institutional, and

cultural relationships (Gee, 1996; Street, 1999). In particular, for researchers working with sociocultural theories, writing is seen as a “practice occurring in a social context, guided by intention, laden with values, and taking on forms and functions that differ according to time and place” (Ferdman et al., 1994, p. 20).

The Chinese students in this study had varied English language proficiencies before arriving in Australia, and achieved different levels of progress during their study in Australia. However, apart from Helen, the other three participants contended that their English proficiency was a barrier to building up a sense of authority in English scholarly writing, especially after they received some negative comments on the language they used. A lack of confidence in using English language, they said, prevented them from developing their identity in their English writing. Their motivation to develop a sense of voice in their English writing was diminished due to language errors or readers’ misunderstanding of their expressions. This finding seriously challenges the argument presented by Li (2015) that language proficiency is not a decisive indicator of identity amongst L2 learners in school or higher education.

For example, Shane reported that he needed to seriously improve his English language capability, if he wanted to represent his Chinese researcher-writer’s identity in his English writing. Ada was concerned with the risk of “Chinglish” if she allowed Chinese linguistic characteristics in her English writing. Therefore, she decided to show her cultural identity through her “written content” rather than from “the language style” she used. There is a link between English proficiency and Chinese students’ awareness and capability of establishing and negotiating their researcher-writer identity in scholarly writing. In so many ways, each case from Chapter 5 through to Chapter 9 shows that enhanced language proficiency helped the researcher-writer to position him/herself as a Chinese researcher writer in English.

### ***How academic discipline influences researcher-writer identity work***

The cases also show that after participants commenced education in Australian universities, the conventions of their different disciplines shaped their understandings of academic writing in different ways. During the period of the study, some of us (Ada, Susan and myself), who worked within the discipline of Education, had started to be aware of the role of our cultural identity in scholarly writing with our professors’/supervisors’ guidance. For example, Ada’s PhD project was indirectly concerned with the issue of identity. Her supervisor often guided her to reflect on how to be true to her cultural identity as a Chinese researcher in her writing.

Consequently, Ada became conscious of the importance of establishing a sense of self/identity in her academic writing. In the course of Susan's study, she had read a range of literature related to the issue of identity. As a result, she became more willing and confident to keep some "Chinese style" in her English scholarly writing (e.g., by occasionally using Chinese metaphors or idioms). Early in my PhD study (also in the field of Education), I made the decision to include an autobiographical preamble in order to provide cultural, biographical and contextual background that I judged to be important to reading and knowledge creation in this thesis. Beyond this, I have included my own critical narrative on English academic writing in Chapter 5, and I frequently used my personal experiences in the data analysis to provide a strong reflexive dimension to that analysis. Our experiences (Ada's, Susan's and my own) suggest that when supervisors encourage the empowerment of their Chinese research students, the students are more likely to find a dialogic space in which they can work through tensions between their own culture and that of the target culture in their L2 writing (FitzGerald, 1999). The different conventions in the particular fields of each of our academic disciplines sometimes allowed us to foreground personal history, context and identity in our research writing in a way that promoted dialogic interaction with our readers and was consistent with the epistemological positions we espoused in our methodologies. This tended to assist us both in the development of our confidence in our own researcher-writer identities and also in the development of more authority in our English academic writing (Stacey, 2009).

However, both Helen and Shane mentioned in the interviews that they did not obtain much guidance about how to present their own voice in their English academic writing from their departments, and their supervisors did not ever address the notion of identity in their writing. Clearly, not all disciplinary writing is of a type, and so students are often left to confront and manage challenges with respect to different disciplines, different institutional requirements and even the distinctive expectations of different supervisors or journal editors (Creme & Makenna, 2010). Thus we see Shane's continued insistence on the use of the passive voice in his writing. Helen also said that scientific writing has to be objective and this requires a distinctly impersonal voice. Their understandings of the use of conventions in their disciplines impacted how/whether they developed a sense of ownership in and of their English scholarly writing. They were inclined to position themselves as "researcher-engineer" (Shane) or "information technician" (Helen), and they were wary of "being identified as a Chinese-speaking writer" in their English academic writing, unless, as Shane said, "my English writing capability is perfect". Their experiences of the notion of 'self as researcher-writer' accords with findings

from Creme and Makenna's (2010) study, which identifies some ESL research students' reluctance to develop their own "writing style". They wanted to strictly conform to the dominant conventions in their academic discourse in their writing, and they were not concerned about the notion of identity as multiple, fluid and expanding (Gee, 2000; Stacey, 2009). In addition to the general conventions from the discipline, another factor mediating students' writer identity involves the expectations of each participant's supervisor.

### ***How expectations of supervisors/teachers influence researcher-writer identity work***

The cases suggest that supervisors/teachers play a critical role in the process of Chinese research students' identity work in their English writing. All of the participants in this study were required to write a research thesis in English to meet the academic requirements of the course they were pursuing. Among them, Ada, Susan and myself had an awareness of culture identity in our English writing and tried to make a conscious effort to reconcile the 'past' and the 'present', the host culture and the home culture. That is partly because our supervisors showed respect for the cultural thought patterns embedded in our writing as long as it did not affect the clarity of the texts. As discussed earlier, we were encouraged to explore a "third space" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 98) in between Chinese and English writing. Regarding my PhD thesis writing, I am more confident now to include some Chinese cultural elements (for example, adding some Chinese idioms and even Chinese characters into my thesis writing) as I know my supervisors, and hopefully my examiners, will consider and respect the cultural dimensions of my English writing. Therefore, our experience with regard to the influence of supervisors in English academic writing corresponds to Strevens's (1987) suggestions about the important role of educators in guiding students to cope with and appreciate both the diversity and equality of language and culture. With our supervisors' support, Ada, Susan and I could interact with the heteroglossia of authoritative discourses and internally persuasive discourses in the ideological environment of our studies (Bakhtin, 1981). We were learning to grapple with differences between others and self, and at the same time we were learning to critically question dominant discourses. In this way, it appears that we have been able to develop our researcher-writer identities as a result of facilitating an ongoing robust dialogue between our own cultural heritage and the cultural expectations of our anticipated readers (Bakhtin, 1981).

In contrast, Shane and Helen constantly received negative comments on their writing involving their Chinese cultural thought patterns and previous Chinese writing style from their

supervisors. When they realized that their supervisors preferred them to write in a “native English speaker’s way”, they tended to be more unwilling to show their real selves in their writing. In this way, it had been difficult for them to engage in productive dialogue with their native culture and host culture in English academic writing as they had been more concerned to align themselves with “the authoritative discourse” (Bakhtin, 1981) and to cater for their supervisors’ preference. In diverse ways, my participants’ experience is consistent with Shen’s (1989) research findings, which show that non-native speakers who learn to write academically in English at a western university have to create a new identity to meet expectations from their professors/teachers in a particular discipline. In that sense, the supervisor/teacher played an important role in their developing researcher-writer identities as they influenced the “ideological environment” (Bakhtin, 1986).

The five stories of Chinese students’ tensions in their writing practices and identities are consistent with Gee’s (2000) multidimensional framing of identity. However, these different dimensions of identity do not exist in isolation; depending on the context, one dimension of identity can be foregrounded while others are backgrounded. In this study, some participants were prepared to mask aspects of their cultural identity to some extent in order to pursue their institutional identity in their English academic writing. As L2 writers, we were engaged in a continuous struggle, negotiating tensions in our researcher-writer identities when writing in Australian educational institutions.

### ***How anticipation of potential readers influences researcher-writer identity work***

All of my interviewees spoke of the importance of knowing or anticipating their intended readers for their academic writing. It is evident that they all had anticipated a kind of reader as they wrote, and they tried to cater for potential readers’ expectations. For example, Helen said that “the most important value of my paper could only be shown from my reader’s understanding. My writing goal is to make sure they could understand my writing easily and clearly”. Helen’s experience echoes her point. She believed the majority of her readers might be English native speakers, thus she felt she had to use the writing style with which her readers were familiar. She was even thinking about what would save time for her readers. This suggests that at least some of my participants were eager to know about their intended readers’ preferred writing and language styles. Their awareness of and anticipation of their readers in their English academic writing challenge the argument presented by Ai (2015) that Chinese students



are not able to establish an awareness of readers in mind in their L2 writing. On the contrary, my participants' consideration of audience is in line with Confucius's "relational self" which highlights the interdependent relationships between the self and other in Chinese society (Tu, 1985). Arguably, Chinese people tend to attach more importance to the relationship with others due to the influence of the philosophy of Confucius. The identity of the Chinese postgraduate writers in this study can be seen to develop in relation to their image of potential readers of their scholarly writing.

Although these Chinese researcher-writers' awareness of reader seems to confirm the dialogic nature of English academic writing to some extent (Smith, 1999), how they interacted with readers in their writing is not completely consistent with what Bakhtin (1986) called the "responsivity" of texts. Bakhtin's concept of responsivity suggests an intermediate space for both listeners and speakers to engage in and develop a dialogue. For some of my participants, although they might have had some awareness of potential readers, they were not necessarily able to initiate an effective dialogue with their potential readers when writing at the crossroad of two cultures. They sometimes tried to "enter" another language and culture in a monologic way because they were only keen on writing to their western readers' preference and standards. Helen reported that it was important to follow western academic standards to cater for her English-speaking readers' tastes. In other words, despite having potential readers in mind, in the process of becoming a certain person in their English scholarly writing, she could not or would not set up an interactive contact zone to search for "intersections or points of interface between western and local cultures" (Shi, 2009, p. 60). To put it simply, in order to meet her readers halfway, she tended to disguise her identity. She and some other participants appeared afraid of the differences and ambivalence that they may have brought from their native culture and thus tried to avoid it to various extents. This approach made it difficult for them to form a new identity in their English writing.

## **11.5 Conclusion**

The combination of factors I have discussed above shows that the development of researcher-writer identities in English academic writing is bound up with the dialogic negotiation of various factors. By looking into multiple factors mediating Chinese writer's identity work in English academic writing, I have tried to show that the concept of researcher-writer identity is associated with multiple aspects. These include: the writer's personal background; their

educational experiences; and the authority of the style of text (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). However, these perspectives are not discrete factors as researcher-writers attempt to develop a sense of their scholarly voice. When my interviewees spoke about writing a scholarly text in English, they cited factors that I have described as ‘non-academic’ perspectives and ‘academic’ perspectives, and I have shown how these categories interrelate and engage with each other dialogically. For example, the cultural views they developed in China dialogically influenced their attitudes towards their supervisors’ comments in Australia. These views, and their practices when learning English in China, invariably mediated the ways they considered potential readers of their scholarly writing in Australia. Their supervisors’ guidance influenced their English proficiency development and their understandings of anticipation of their intended readers. Each factor dialogically interacted with other factors. The participants in this study were all, to a greater or lesser extent, negotiating dialogic relationships between different factors in the process of researching and writing. In that sense, my study can be seen to illustrate aspects of Gee’s (2000) theorizing of identity, which proposes a combination of interacting identity dimensions in the individual’s identity work and, consequently, their writing practices.

## **PART SIX: CONCLUSION**

## Chapter 12 Conclusion

### 12.1 Overview

This qualitative case study has explored in depth five Chinese postgraduate students' understandings and experiences of their English academic writing practices while they studied and researched in Australian universities. There has been a particular focus on the identity work associated with the students' ongoing efforts to improve the quality of their writing. The participants of this study included four Chinese postgraduate research students from different disciplines in universities in Melbourne, and myself as the fifth participant. In deciding to include and analyze my own understandings and experiences of English academic writing as a Chinese PhD student in an Australian university, I was consciously creating a space to reflexively scrutinize the knowledge and meaning making in my research and considering my own experiences in relation to my other four participants. By combining a case study design with narrative-based inquiry methods, this study has been able to investigate similarities and differences in the ways Chinese postgraduate students in Australia develop their academic writing skills and identities, and to identify a range of factors that mediate their English academic writing practices.

Bakhtin's dialogic theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theories have played a central role in this investigation. As I discussed in Chapter 2, despite some key differences in the theories of Bakhtin and Vygotsky as they apply to learning and teaching a language, it has been feasible and generative to work with both theorists' works. The combination of their theories has offered me a powerful framework for analysing their stories, thereby showing the connections of Chinese researcher-writers to their complex academic and cultural identities and to the particular ways they worked in their higher education context.

The study identified four key categories of dialogue the students participated in their English academic writing (although these dialogic elements were not necessarily recognised in as many words by the students.) The four categories of dialogue were: 1) interpersonal dialogue; 2) intrapersonal dialogue; 3) intertextual dialogue; and 4) intratextual dialogue. Also, I described what I call – after Gee (2000) and Bauman (2004) – the researcher-writer 'identity work' of the Chinese postgraduate students. I closely examined how this identity work was associated

with the day-to-day practicalities and activities of their English scholarly writing. My analysis of this identity work indicated that these students, and I included myself in this, found themselves grappling with a complex range of factors from both academic and non-academic perspectives as they wrote their theses or scholarly articles. I theorized this grappling as ‘creating dialogic spaces’, where they could negotiate and develop their cultural and academic identities in English scholarly writing.

The study makes an important contribution to knowledge, firstly in terms of the Chinese postgraduate students who are studying in an international setting and in the process of learning to write academic English at a sophisticated level. For these students, the study provides rich nuanced accounts of the experiences of five different individuals developing their academic writing. Secondly, the findings have implications for different groups of people involved with supporting Chinese students’ efforts to learn how to write in English in their higher education research degrees. This includes supervisors, policy makers and administrators in universities in English speaking countries, as well as researchers in the field of English academic writing. I draw attention to the need for international graduate research programs to better resource and support Chinese (and all international) postgraduate students’ participation in a range of dialogic research spaces and interactions as they seek to improve their English academic writing skills.

Having now provided a broad overview of my study, I now proceed to use the research questions of the study to present a brief review of the major findings.

## **12.2 Summary of findings and answers to the research questions**

I highlight the main themes and issues by ‘responding’ to each research question, one at a time, beginning with Question 1.

*Question 1: What are Chinese postgraduate students’ understandings and experiences of English writing practices in Australian universities?*

The study shows that English academic writing practices and experiences of Chinese postgraduate students can be understood as dialogic in nature, although the students participating in this study may not have always understood them in these terms. The students engaged in a range of strategies that enabled them to see dialogic connections between texts

and dialogic links within the texts they were creating. They were able to generate reflective dialogue about their writing internally (e.g., in their heads) and they found it useful to dialogue with other people when they needed to confirm their understandings, clarify their thoughts, explore new ideas or negotiate their emerging academic voices as postgraduate students and early career researchers. In my interviews with the students, they showed varied understandings of the dialogic nature of their English academic writing. Some of them (especially Helen) appreciated the dynamic process of generating and refining ideas and language in their writing. Others (especially Shane) believed that the dynamic changes that happened in their writing processes were sometimes a source of frustration, and they felt that the uncertainty of these processes sometimes negatively impacted their ability to write quickly and efficiently.

All participants reported that they experienced conflict and tensions in their writing practices. At least in the early stages of their writing, they tended to be frustrated by or even resentful of these conflicts. For instance, Ada said she was afraid of receiving feedback from her supervisor that pointed out her unclear expressions in English writing, because she felt it often was clear in her mind. I have argued that this is not necessarily an unhelpful part of Ada's and the other students' academic writing experiences. According to Bakhtin (1981), all meaning making with language involves contradictions and conflict. Engaging in some forms of dialogic activities seemed to allow the students to make sense of the contradictions, dilemmas and tensions they so often experienced in their writing. Purposefully grappling with these contradictions and tensions can be beneficial, and indeed some of the students expressed their appreciation of the fact that all academic writing involves some kinds of struggles to make meaning. These students understood that the struggle to find the appropriate language to explain their ideas and understandings in their theses or scholarly articles was often hard work, but they appreciated that this was the kind of hard work that enabled them to create new knowledge as researchers in their own particular fields.

Whether the students were metacognitively aware of their practices or not, my analysis of their cases was able to identify the particular ways in which they were dealing with these challenges. I theorized these ways as 'interpersonal', 'intrapersonal', 'intertextual' and 'intratextual' dialogue, in which they participated as part of their English academic writing. I showed how their conscious or unconscious deployment of these dialogic practices allowed these Chinese postgraduate students to gradually accept, and in some cases appreciate, elements of ambiguity in their English writing. Rather than being restricted to one or another of these categories of

dialogue, the students developed, to some extent, their own distinctive approaches. For instance, different participants had different preferences between the four categories of dialogue identified and this influenced the strategies they used to solve challenges and or deal with struggles in their English academic writing. For instance, Helen attached great importance to dialogic thinking or what Vygotsky (1986) calls “inner speech” in the form of intrapersonal dialogue. Others (especially Susan and myself) valued interpersonal dialogue, which meant we actively sought support from peers or knowledgeable others in various social spaces. I argue that these four categories of dialogue can work in a dialogic relationship with each other to benefit a number of practical aspects of these students’ writing. The findings suggest that the five students were most successful when they were able to flexibly transfer within and between these four categories of dialogue as they grappled with the complexities and challenges of academic writing in English.

Of central importance in this study has been Bakhtin’s theorizing of language as consisting of interrelated ideologies, voices, cultures and histories in continuous dialogue with each other. Bakhtin (1981) argues, for instance, that

the word in language is always half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only 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)

The narrative cases I have constructed in Chapters 6 to 9 are constructed from the stories and language that the four participants used in their interviews with me to explain their experiences and their challenges in becoming more confident and competent writers in academic English. Using Bakhtinian discourses, I have been able to show how the students were to varying extents able to make the English ‘words’ they were writing ‘their own’. I did this through describing their struggles in writing, and explaining some of the strategies they used to overcome the difficulties they faced. In my analysis of the students’ narrative cases, informed by my knowledge of their historical, social and educational backgrounds, I explained how these backgrounds mediated their writing practices.

*Questions 2: What factors influence and mediate Chinese postgraduate students’ English academic writing practices?*

This study shows that there were different factors influencing and mediating these students' English academic writing practices and their negotiation of researcher-writer identities. Thus, their learning of English academic writing can be seen as embedded in social, cultural, and academic contexts. While it is impossible for this study to explore all of the factors that mediate Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing, the Discussion Chapter (11) has highlighted a wide range of factors, and I have chosen five of them to mention here.

i) Chinese writing experiences:

The Chinese postgraduate students' own distinctive Chinese writing styles, especially in terms of Chinese linguistic features and rhetorical values, were a significant factor influencing the English scholarly writing they produced. For example, traditional Chinese writing conventions tend to value indirectness and emotion (Yang, 2001), while English writing values straightforwardness and linear logic (Sohn, 1983). In various ways, the students negotiated these differences and created their own styles. Their backgrounds as Chinese writers influenced the ways they made their own lexical choices, shaped their own sentences and overall structure, and deployed various rhetorical strategies in their English academic writing. The Chinese students reported that they needed to choose, modify and adapt some of their experience of writing in Chinese with some consideration of the conventions in Australian academic discourses and the English contexts within which they were writing.

ii) Cultural background:

The students' English writing practices showed influences of what might be described as Confucian values and ideologies. In many ways, the culture of collectivism often associated with Confucian values impacted their attitudes towards conventions and norms in western academic discourses and strategies they employed to deal with the differences. Confucian thinking views an individual as being born into a web of social relationships, which require obedience to rituals in order to achieve a degree of harmony. At least one of the students (Shane) preferred to 'follow' these conventions in his English academic writing rather than questioning them. Other participants considered the Confucian hierarchical structure of social interaction when engaging in dialogue with supervisors, colleagues, or other researchers in their reading literature, but not in terms of simply following the conventions. Rather, they consciously modified their manner of interaction with these different people, in the hope of achieving a balance of being respectful and compliant but also critical and independent thinkers.



iii) English education in China:

The grammar-oriented English education the students had experienced as children in Chinese primary and secondary schools influenced their attitudes to and capabilities of coping with tensions and dilemmas in their English academic writing. Rather than being passive learners as was usually expected of them in China, in Australian academic settings they were required to develop creative and independent ideas for their scholarly research writing. Also, the pragmatic perspective on English study that was dominant while they were at school in China (Gui, 2009) steered them to meeting immediate needs, such as lexical choice in writing to complete their academic writing tasks. It influenced how they developed their writing styles and voices in English academic writing as they sometimes tended to put most of their efforts into putting ‘correct’ sentences together and following grammar rules to achieve their pragmatic purposes.

iv) English language proficiency:

The students often expressed concern about their use of “Chinglish” and their lack of ownership of the English language. This, they said, affected their development of a meaningful cultural identity in and through their English scholarly writing. Although some of them had acquired a wide vocabulary and good knowledge of English grammar, they still felt they struggled with the appropriate use of vocabulary and grammatical structures in their English academic writing.

v) Expectations of academic discipline and supervisors:

The students spoke about confronting and managing challenges with respect to their particular discipline, particular institutional requirements and the distinctive expectations of their supervisors (Creme & Makenna, 2010). Invariably, their engagement with four categories of dialogue and their identity work in English academic writing were influenced by the academic discourse preferences and the expectations of their supervisors. For example, participants who were completing PhDs in Education (Ada, Susan and myself) felt more confident to grapple with differences between themselves and others. They were supported in this because their supervisors appreciated and encouraged diversity and independence in the use of language and negotiation of ‘cultural voice’ in English academic writing (Stevens, 1987).

These are just five of the factors mediating Chinese postgraduate students’ English academic writing. This study shows that the students negotiated these factors in their own ways, and as important as this, in Chapter 11, I showed these factors operated in interrelated ways with each

other. The students' engagement with any one of them in their English academic writing was inevitably influenced by other factors.

*Questions 3: How do Chinese postgraduate students negotiate their researcher-writer identities in English academic writing?*

Due to their varying cultural backgrounds, these Chinese postgraduate students found themselves generating and managing an ongoing inner dialogue emerging from their contrasting Chinese and English writing practices. This involved becoming more aware of the differences in linguistic features and rhetorical styles between Chinese and English. Through this process, my participants and I experienced a constant sense of struggle between our identities as Chinese English writers, teachers, researchers and students. Some of us were able to gain a deeper understanding of these different identities and came to cultivate our own distinctive researcher-writer identity through our English scholarly writing.

This study shows that the students' researcher-writer identity work could be characterised as hybrid and fluid. Some of the students (Helen and Shane) took what Chase (1998) calls an "accommodation" strategy, in their efforts to become writers using the discourses and language styles that their supervisors or native English-speaking readers wished to see in their graduate research writing. This, too, had an influence on their identity work, in that they felt compelled to value, follow and imitate what they saw as western writing styles and customs. However, their inclination to accommodate western ideologies and practices sometimes brought about additional challenges and struggles in establishing a researcher-writer identity with which they felt comfortable.

My study has suggested that the more 'successful' strategies of the students involved creating a "third space" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 98) between two collections of academic cultures, Chinese and Australian, and entering into this space in a "lively" way (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 54). To do so, we Chinese researcher-writers constantly moved across the boundaries of the two languages and cultures in order to negotiate the complex differences and contradictions we experienced in our English academic writing. In this way, we developed our researcher-writer identities by provisionally referencing our cultural heritage but also strategically connecting with our understandings of the ideologies in the English speaking host country. Rather than writing in ways that offered certainty and stability of meaning making processes, we recognized that we grew to enjoy the sense of uncertainty that came from undertaking postgraduate research in

Australia. Bhabha (1994) refers to this as writing in a ‘third space’. In fact, most of the participants in this study came to see this as a comfortable space, and to varying extents we welcomed its ambiguities, compromises, and negotiations.

### **12.3 Recommendations**

In this section, I present recommendations with respect to the practices, support, supervision and research of English academic writing in L2 settings based on the main findings discussed above. I illustrate how this study can be seen as providing insights into the everyday experiences of Chinese postgraduate students studying, researching and often publishing while enrolled in Australian universities. To do this, the study offers rich, theorized and grounded accounts of the everyday experiences of these students’ English scholarly writing and their reflections on their writing. Few studies of work in this area have provided the kind of situated accounts I offer here, and so current Chinese students now have access to authentic theorized experiences against which they can reflect on their own experiences and perhaps learn from them, too. The study is also advising supervisors and administrators of universities in English speaking countries to consider what they could do to offer better learning environments and more supportive peer collaborative spaces or mentoring for and between their Chinese postgraduate students. Finally, it encourages researchers to undertake further investigation into postgraduate students’ English academic writing practices in L2 settings.

#### **12.3.1 Recommendations for individual Chinese researcher-writers**

This study offers the following recommendations for individual Chinese researcher-writers pursuing education and research in English speaking countries. Although this study cannot and does not wish to generalize its findings across all Chinese international students who are writing in English, it could be seen as offering some recommendations for some other groups of Chinese international students, such as undergraduate students.

##### *Recommendation One: Recognize the existence and potential value of different dialogic practices*

This study encourages Chinese researcher-writers to recognize the existence and potential value of different dialogic practices in English academic writing. It reveals how the Chinese postgraduate students participating in this study utilised interpersonal dialogue, intrapersonal dialogue, intertextual dialogue, and/or intratextual dialogue for different purposes during their

English academic writing. They engaged in one or more of them at different times in their English academic writing processes, such as brainstorming, planning, reading, drafting, seeking feedback, and revising. In the extended interviews I had with participants, they reported that the more they accepted and appreciated English academic writing as a dialogic and iterative activity (although they did not necessarily use this particular language), the more likely they were to improve their English academic writing by engaging with different categories of dialogue.

The study shows that some Chinese postgraduate students (especially Shane) were strong in (or preferred) some particular categories of dialogue, while they were less strong (or they disliked) the others for various reasons, such as personal interests, previous education, or cultural backgrounds. Due to the interconnected relationship between these four categories of dialogue, I argue that researcher-writers would benefit from engaging in various categories of dialogue in their English academic writing, and strategically prioritize their time and efforts within different writing contexts. For example, when Shane experienced struggles with managing his spontaneous, free-flowing and divergent thoughts (cf. Guilford, 1977), he needed to seek support from his social community (interpersonal dialogue) as well as interact with literature resources through relating voices from other texts to his own voice and thoughts (intertextual dialogue). For each participant, these four categories of dialogue played important but different roles in enhancing their writing fluency, coherence, efficiency and quality.

*Recommendation Two: Create a “third space” for negotiating between Chinese cultures and Australian/western cultures*

Whilst I have strived to avoid constructing cultural stereotypes, the study nevertheless illustrates that there are differences between English and Chinese writing, in term of the choice of words, the construction of sentence patterns and essay structures, and the use of rhetorical strategies. The participants utilised different strategies to negotiate these differences in order to develop their own voices in English academic writing. Helen and Shane preferred to ‘accommodate’ the privileged discourses and language styles in western academic writing because they felt that their writing in Australian academic communities was mostly judged by western writing criteria and rhetorical value systems. In taking this view, they appeared to feel in some ways ‘inferior’ and ‘limited’ in their English writing because they had to discard or hide some of their native-cultural values and rhetorical styles. In this respect, Canagarajah (2002) points out that students should be encouraged to appropriate the dominate discourse

critically and bring their own values, experiences and cultural identities into their L2 writing. In order to do so, when students focus on communicating accurate knowledge clearly and without confusion, they need to be less preoccupied in their writing practices with certainty and stability, and more accepting of periods when they will be unsure and uncertain in the processes of developing their scholarly writing outputs.

*Recommendation Three: Accept and use ‘China Englishes’, at times*

This study demonstrates Chinese postgraduate students’ understandings about their ownership of the English language when writing thesis or scholarly articles in English. They were keen on learning and using “locally standard English”, as participants called it in interviews, because they tended to assume that the English language was created and developed in these English-speaking countries. Helen said she tried to remove any evidence of Chinese thinking styles and Chinese culture from her English academic writing to avoid “Chinglish” expressions. For Helen, the lack of a sense of ownership of the English language in her writing caused challenges and problems in her researcher-writer identity work. I argue that it can be useful for Chinese students to critically examine any assumption on their part that there is no alternative than to use so-called ‘standard English’ in academic writing. As discussed in Chapters 2 to 3, the concept of ‘standard English’ is considerably fluid and dynamic due to the existence of various regional and national standards (Cui, 2006). For Chinese people, there has been a shift away from Kachru’s (1986) three circles model of communication in English to a model based on ‘China Englishes’, which can be adapted to express Chinese cultures and have Chinese characteristics in terms of lexis, sentence structure, and discourse pattern (Li, 1993; Horner & Lu, 2006). The study suggests that greater acceptance of ‘China Englishes’ by students themselves will help them establish a stronger sense of ownership in their use of English language and have more confidence in developing cultural and academic identities in their English academic writing.

### **12.3.2 Recommendations for supervisors**

This study shows that supervisors play a crucial role in Chinese postgraduate students’ writing of English theses or scholarly articles. In order to better support these students in their English academic writing and to develop their cultural and academic identities, this study offers the following recommendations for supervisors.

*Recommendation Four: Encourage and inspire students to engage in different categories of dialogue*

Participants in this study mostly experienced traditional pedagogies for teaching and learning English as a foreign language in China when they were children at school. When learning to write in English in a traditional way, the focus was on achieving correct grammar and vocabulary use. The critical review of literature in Chapters 2 to 3 shows how this focus tends to disregard the students' and writers' particular needs and certainly their cultural identities in their English writing practices. The many instances of successful dialogic practices in the narrative cases presented in Chapters 5 to 9, and my analysis of these cases, provide compelling evidence for university supervisors to consider the importance of encouraging Chinese postgraduate students to engage in different categories of dialogue. In order to support students to do so, supervisors need to be aware of the importance of equal and reciprocal relationships between students and themselves. Some of the Chinese postgraduate students in this study had previously experienced hierarchical relationships with their teachers in China and were therefore 'trained' to respect the authoritative status of teachers in China. Supervisors can play a critical role in establishing a mutually respectful dialogical relationship that enables students and supervisors to appreciate each other's knowledge and experience and refine their critical consciousness (Gui, 2009). For example, supervisors can encourage students to ask questions, engage them in conversations, have respect for their own viewpoints, and support their participation in a range of dialogic research spaces (e.g., supervisors from some disciplines may encourage students to do some autobiographical writing in their early stages of their candidature, as part of the process of understanding oneself as a researcher.)

*Recommendation Five: Utilise four categories of dialogue to diagnose students' writing problems and offer suggestions*

The study reveals Chinese postgraduate students experienced various challenges when engaging in these categories of dialogic practices. What might appear to be a most challenging approach could sometimes be the most beneficial because of the way a particular dialogic practice could prompt the students to work out solutions to their difficulties. For example, Susan reported she felt "pain" when she needed to arrange and structure her ideas logically and fluently into the outline. She resorted to further intertextual dialogic reading and interpersonal dialogue to develop and improve her thoughts and resolve these challenges. The four categories of dialogue I have discussed in this thesis are interrelated in complex ways – they are not separate and discrete practices. It can be valuable for student researcher-writers to engage in

one or more of these four categories of dialogue at various points in the processes of developing a particular piece of English academic writing, whether it be a chapter of a thesis, a journal article or a paper to be presented at the student's home institution or at a conference. The dialogue can also be enacted in various combinations to help supervisors diagnose areas where students need to develop aspects of their English academic writing. They might generate a lively academic dialogue from which can emerge solutions for particular writing struggles or problems, and this dialogue might even reveal powerful constructive suggestions for improving the student's writing. With greater understanding about the potential of dialogic writing practices in social spaces, supervisors and students working together in collegial ways can employ more effective pedagogies to support students' writing even at postgraduate level.

*Recommendation Six: Create a culturally inclusive 'third space' to support students' L2 writing*

This study shows that the Chinese student participants confronted various difficulties in negotiating the differences between Chinese writing and English writing. In particular, negotiation of a researcher-writer's identity is a complicated and challenging task for a Chinese postgraduate student. The narrative cases illustrate how some supervisors can use the notion of a culturally inclusive 'third space' to encourage Chinese students to engage in productive dialogue – not just spoken dialogue – when faced with dilemmas or conflicting advices about content, writing styles and scholarly debates in their discipline area. When the students are appropriately supported by supervisors in their efforts to understand and engage with differences in culture, language, ideology, research paradigm and discourse, they can become more confident, critical, and autonomous English academic writers. Therefore, this study suggests that supervisors should not take for granted students' capacity to 'accommodate' themselves to global expectations in English scholarly writing (such as when writing with the intention of publishing in an international journal) or local practices in meeting the requirements of a particular institution in regard to their PhD or master's degree requirements. Supervisors need to take time to learn about, value and be willing to work with students' different educational backgrounds and experiences and even their culturally shaped beliefs about English academic writing, rather than imposing narrow models or expectations of what they believe constitutes scholarly writing in English. Also, they need to constantly and critically reflect on their own pedagogical practices and offer a flexible and open space for students to develop their voice and identity in their English academic writing.

*Recommendation Seven: Appreciate the value of generic knowledge of writing and yet the dynamic nature of academic writing*

This study illustrates how five Chinese postgraduate students working in different disciplines can have vastly different beliefs about writing itself and about writing practices. Their status as *Chinese* postgraduate students does not mean that they share the same or even similar beliefs about such things. The students have also been shown to have different understandings about English academic writing conventions in terms of the required structure or genre of a scholarly article, the rhetorical technique academics must use to generate authority in a piece of published research, and the options open to them in terms of language usage. However, this is not to suggest that there is no body of knowledge about writing that these diverse students can engage with and learn from. My study shows, however, that there is a huge repertoire of linguistic skills, writing practices and scholarly traditions from which students can learn, and much of this ‘context-free’ knowledge can help individuals manage linguistic and syntactic choices in their writing.

More importantly, supervisors need to guide students on how to work within the confines of the disciplinary, cultural and institutional frameworks while nurturing and promoting the identity work of each researcher-writer. That is to say, in seeking to support Chinese postgraduate students’ English language development, supervisors need to address and highlight the dynamic and diverse perspectives of academic writing. Rather than merely teaching those so-called writing rules or norms, supervisors should guide students towards an awareness of the options that academic writing offers (Hyland, 2002). For example, supervisors could guide students to be aware of and learn to work with various frameworks and conventions from their particular disciplinary area.

### **12.3.3 Recommendations for policy makers and institutions in Australian universities**

Policy makers and institutions in Australian universities also play a significant role in helping Chinese international students’ English academic writing improvement. For example, participants mentioned in the interviews how they learned a great deal about English academic writing from participating in seminars about academic writing and seeking assistance from language support centres in universities. Also, policy makers and institutions have responsibilities to support and offer training opportunities to supervisors to enhance their understandings and knowledge about Chinese international students’ cultural backgrounds.



Therefore, there are at least two ways in which policy makers and institutions in Australian universities could better support Chinese international students' academic writing development.

*Recommendation Eight: Provide programs that offer a range of pedagogies to cater for students' different needs as academic writers*

Although the five Chinese participants had some similarities in their cultural and educational backgrounds, their English writing practices also showed many differences in terms of strength, difficulty, and the type of support they needed. My study showed various factors, such as personal quality, English proficiency, and native language writing experience, which influenced the Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing in different ways. Therefore, when administrators and policy makers design and develop professional development programs for supervisors in universities, they should not assume that these programs will simply prescribe one universally 'standard' pedagogical approach, one which could be utilized across all educational settings. Rather, these programs need to prepare supervisors with a range of pedagogical approaches with considerations of students' backgrounds and differing needs. In this way, supervisors are more likely to be able to adjust their advice and supervision pedagogy in ways that better understand the complexity and diversity of international students.

*Recommendation Nine: Provide dialogic writing support services that guide students as to how they can develop their academic voices*

The role that writing support services in universities have traditionally played in Chinese postgraduate students' learning about English academic writing has tended to focus mainly on enhancing grammar correctness and improving language fluency. In order to improve the appropriateness and effectiveness of this support, this study suggests that writing support services in Australian universities, such as coaching, seminars and workshops, need to be aware of not only focusing on the correct use of linguistic and grammar dimensions of students' English writing, but also guiding them to express their voice confidently and appropriately. Moreover, administrators in language support centres need to be familiar with the different requirements of English academic writing across different disciplines so that they can offer support that satisfies expectations in students' specific fields. When designing and implementing workshops and seminars for international students, they should seek to provide a dialogic and flexible space that enables students to negotiate the tensions that result from the

differences in cultures and languages, rather than just concentrating on generic linguistic rules and structures in English writing.

#### **12.3.4 Recommendations for future research**

Through exploring Chinese postgraduate students' writing practices and their researcher-writers' identity work, my study makes a contribution to the field of transcultural experiences of higher education in English speaking countries. In this section, I reflect on the research design and methods I used in this study, and present some recommendations for researchers who are interested in further investigating such students' English academic writing practices and knowledges.

##### *Recommendation Ten: Employ multiple methods to generate, present and analyze data*

As I discussed in the Methodology Chapter 4, the use of a combination of case study design and narrative-based inquiry methods helped me to generate important insights into the experiences of Chinese postgraduate students' academic writing in English. They enabled me to represent the participants' English academic writing as complex and dialogic processes that encompassed many factors. I hope that my study might encourage other researchers in this field to use multiple qualitative methods to inquire into Chinese postgraduate students' English academic writing in depth and develop a more detailed understanding about it. The strategies that I hope this study encourages researchers to explore in the future include the following:

- *Analysis of English academic texts*

Researchers might conduct a closer analysis of one or two English academic written texts produced by Chinese postgraduate participants. Although in this study I have undertaken a brief examination of some of the participants' English academic written work in Chapters 5 to 9, a more detailed and nuanced analysis could add important insights through evaluating the effectiveness of different categories of dialogic practices in relation to students' English written texts, and the influence of a participant's individual background on his/her identity work in English academic writing.

- *Interviewing supervisors*

This study focused only on five Chinese postgraduate students' understandings and attitudes of English academic writing practices. A follow-up study to this one may conduct additional

interviews with *supervisors* of these students in Australian universities. Representing and analysing stories from supervisors about their understandings of Chinese students' English academic writing practices as well as teaching and assessing experiences of students' writing would provide rich data and further important insights.

*Recommendation Eleven: Undertake a more longitudinal research design*

The time framework for collecting data in this study was relatively short (over the course of just one year). Future research may consider adopting a more longitudinal research design. As most full-time PhD students in Australian universities have a 3-4 year candidature, a longitudinal study would allow for more thorough follow-up of some of the issues during different time phases of their PhD candidature, such as at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of their candidature. Participants' beliefs, understandings and experiences of English academic writing are not likely to be fixed or stable throughout their candidature as the writing contexts in which they are embedded are constantly changing. A longitudinal study would allow the researcher to look into the dynamic nature of the dialogical relationships within/between various factors related to English academic writing. For example, it would be valuable to investigate if and how the students develop skills in engaging in dialogue with other students over the journey of their research candidature and how this influences their experiences of their writing practices or the quality of their writing.

## **12.4 Epilogue**

In writing this conclusion to my PhD thesis, memories of when I commenced my Master's study in an Australian university as a very inexperienced Chinese postgraduate student in 2007 come flooding back to me. There was so much to learn, and I was often struggling to maintain my confidence in the face of innumerable challenges. I remember, the experience of enrolling as a PhD student, and I remember the first day (in the midst of this PhD journey) when I started my career as a language teacher in an Australian secondary school. In all of my experiences as a researcher and as a teacher, I have always needed to write in English. I have needed to write for a wide range of purposes – some of them academic, some of them professional, and some of them outside these two very broad categories of writing. My own beliefs and understandings about English academic writing (and all writing in English, actually) have constantly changed along the journey of my PhD, and I suspect they will continue to change. There were countless times when I faced significant challenges in telling a complicated story or interpreting a

complex theory. There were days when I struggled to work out how to proceed when faced with some dilemma or contradiction in my thinking or in the data that I was trying to make sense of. Other days I worked long and hard to rein in my divergent thinking or just represent my voice as a researcher-writer. Sometimes, I felt at a loss where to take my thesis writing. Some of these times were deeply challenging for me. But I never lost hope that I would find a way through because I always firmly believed that I was not alone in my journey of PhD writing.

Now I can appreciate the different categories of dialogue I have engaged in and the struggles and tensions I have grappled with during my thesis writing, now that I have completed a whole PhD study. I have learned so much about myself as a researcher and a writer in the process. These experiences have empowered me to express myself and my story more confidently and freely, in my own words, and hopefully along the way to make a meaningful contribution to the lives and experiences of future Chinese postgraduate students who might one day come and study in Australia.

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## **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix 1: Recruitment Advertisement**

**Are you a Chinese postgraduate writer studying at University?**

**Do you want to improve your writing in English?**

My name is Meihui Wang and I am conducting a research project for a PhD in Education at Monash University under the supervision of Dr. Graham Parr, an associate professor in the Faculty of Education in Monash University. My project will focus on how Chinese postgraduate students in Australia are learning to write in English in academic contexts and how they improve their English academic writing.

In my research, I am particularly interested in exploring students' perceptions of academic writing and approaches by which they use to improve their academic writing. I am seeking 4-7 volunteer participants for my research project. The participants should be under taking a Masters degree by research or a PhD. They should be from China and have some experience in writing both in Chinese and English.

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please contact Meihui Wang by email - [REDACTED] Thank you!

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out your difficulties and beliefs about academic writing. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the items in the questionnaire. So please answer the items as frankly as possible. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and they will not have any effect on your grade or anyone's opinion about you. If you want to explain some answers in detail or make some comments, you could do that on the second page.

### Background information:

1. Gender:   \_\_female   \_\_male
2. Age group:   \_\_20-25   \_\_26-30   \_\_31-35   \_\_35-40   \_\_41-45   \_\_46-50
3. How long have you been studying English? \_\_\_\_\_ years
4. Undergraduate study:  
What is the major of your undergraduate study? \_\_\_\_\_  
What is the name of the institution where you are enrolled? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Postgraduate  
What is your postgraduate discipline? \_\_\_\_\_  
What is the name of the institution where you are enrolled? \_\_\_\_\_
6. English proficiency: How would you rate your English proficiency? (Please indicate a ranking level from 1 to 5, where 1 is the highest level and 5 is the lowest) \_\_\_\_\_

### Academic writing in English

The following questions relate to various aspects of academic writing. Please place a tick (✓) in each of the columns beside each statement, according to the following scale:

- 1- I strongly disagree
- 2- I disagree
- 3- I neither agree or disagree
- 4- I agree
- 5- I strongly agree

		I strongly disagree	I disagree	I neither agree nor disagree	I agree	I strongly agree
<b>Views about writing</b>	1. Writing in English is different from writing in Chinese.					
	2. I am comfortable with writing in English.					
	3. Writing is a linear process: you start by thinking ideas, writing them and finally revising them.					

	4. Writing is a social act rather than an individual activity.					
<b>Strengths and problems when Writing in English</b>	5. I am confident about my English proficiency in my ESL writing.					
	6. I often take into account the context of my writing (i.e. the purpose, the possible audience, the place where the writing will appear) when I engage in writing.					
	7. I am able to effectively explore ideas in academic writing.					
	8. I am able to effectively organize my ideas in my academic writing.					
	9. I am able to engage in critical thinking in my academic writing.					
	10. My native cultural conventions have influenced my way of thinking and writing.					
<b>Strategies in academic writing</b>	11. Talking with others during writing is important for my writing.					
	12. I pay attention to both ideas and content when revising.					
	13. I find that a good way to develop writing is to read extensively.					
	14. I have gained much support from my faculty/university about my ESL writing					
	15. I spend much time thinking and planning before writing.					

### **Appendix 3: The First Interview Questions**

1. Do you have any memories that stand out about your English writing in schools in China?
2. How do you feel about writing in English in Australia? (e.g., confident, comfortable, anxious, or frustrated?)
3. Imagine you have been given a major written task for one of your university subjects. Explain in detail how you would complete this task.
4. What do you think are your strengths as a L2 writer? How do you develop these strengths?
5. What are some big challenges in your English academic writing? How do you deal with these challenges?
6. To what extent (if at all) are these challenges related to your particular cultural and educational background?
7. What do you think of borrowing something from others' texts? How do you deal with your reading materials?
8. How are the institutions where you study helpful or supportive in your English academic writing?
9. Do you use your personal or professional network relationships while writing? Who are also involved in your writing processes, e.g., talking or working with others?
10. To what extent do you think you could have a particular identity in your English academic writing in your particular discipline?
11. Do you think you need to follow some particular writing norms and cultural conventions studying and writing in Australia universities?



## **Appendix 4: The Second Interview Questions (Shane)**

### **Questions from the first interview:**

1. You said that English study in university in China has higher requirements. Could you give me more explanation about these requirements?
2. Do you often talk with people from your personal circle, such as your friends and family, when writing?
3. What do you think about your position in communication with your supervisor?

### **Second interview questions**

1. You have used “we” in your paper although it shows that this paper is a single author paper. Could you explain who this term refers to in your paper? And why did you use “we”?
2. You have mentioned the importance of logic in academic writing. Could you take this paper as an example to explain how you deal with the logic in the paper structure as well as in and between sentences?

#### **Follow-up interview:**

- the structure of the paper
  - The linking words between sentences
3. In the last interview, you have talked about the importance of critical capability in writing. Could you point out some parts in the paper which could be examples to show your critical ability? How did you do that?

#### **Follow-up interview:**

- When you talk about others’ work or theories in the literature review, have you been aware of the use of critical ability?
4. You have mentioned that there is a specific language style in your professional area. Could you specify the language style in this paper? What are the characteristics of that language style?
  5. You have talked about the academic nature of the paper you write, such as the use of complicated words. Could you explain how you dealt with the choice of words in the paper?
  6. What were the main challenges in writing of this text?

## Appendix 5: Sample of Interview Transcription and Translation

<p>记者：好，第一个问题就是是继上一个 interview 的问题来的，我想问一下就是说你曾经提到过你的英文写作中的一些中国的，中国文化的一些风格，比如您曾经提过说咱们那种中国的欲扬先抑，或者说先讲一讲背景，然后再到那种最主要那个 point，这样的。或者说最后一句话它把才把那个中心讲出来这种写作习惯，你在上 interview 中讲过，那么我想重新问一下，就在你现在写这个（英文）的时候还用这种风格吗，会用这种风格吗？</p>	<p>R: ok, the first question is developed from the previous interview question. You have mentioned that you adopted a certain Chinese style based on Chinese culture, for example, you talked about ‘欲扬先抑’ (Compliment goes after the criticism); or you write the background first and then go to the main point, something like that; or you tell your main point only in the final sentence, such kind of writing habits. You talked about these in last interviewing. Therefore I want to ask about it again: do you still persist in the same writing style now?</p>
<p>嘉宾：当然不会了。</p>	<p>A: of course not.</p>
<p>记者：就是说你已经把原来的那种风格完全给扔掉了，放弃了。</p>	<p>R: Do you mean you reject your original style? You give it up?</p>
<p>嘉宾：我不能说完全扔掉了，但是你经常就.....接受这种比较专业的训练好像是，就是四年的时间下来，然后你应该知道做（academic writing），就是用英语来写是什么样子的，我不会。就是如果而且我对自己这种风格肯定也是有一定的意识，然后一旦在写作时候我发现这样的问题的话我肯定会尽力避免，就不会再去照这种风格来。</p>	<p>A: I can't say I reject it at all. But I often...you know, due to the professional trainings I received during these four years, I know what academic writing should be. Also I am aware of my personal writing style. I would try to avoid it when I found I had such problems in my writing. I wouldn't insist on this style.</p>
<p>记者：所以你之所以改变原先你曾经提过的这种学术风格，就是以前的那种中国的学术风格是因为你觉得现在的这个才是标准？</p>	<p>R: So did you change your academic writing style because you think the present one is the standard one?</p>
<p>嘉宾：这个只能说是按照英语习惯来写，我的习惯就是如果你用中文来写的话我肯定还是照原来的中文的那种风格来，但是英文的话我就照英文的习惯，入乡随俗嘛应该是。</p>	<p>A: I just follow the English writing style. My habit is that, if I write in Chinese, I do it in a Chinese way; When I write in English I follow the English styles. Do as Romans when you are in Rome.</p>
<p>记者：嗯，好。再一个问题啊，就是你说这些就是一直以来从在中国，后来到了比利时对不对，然后后来又到澳大利亚，然后一直到现在。我想问一下就整个过程中你和英文写作的关系，或者说你觉得你怎么在英文写作中怎么（position）yourself，有什么变化吗？打个比方说，你以前提过的，很早很早在中国的时候读本科的时候你写英文一直是一种比较被动的，也没有什么情感。</p>	<p>R: Well, another question: you have been in China and Belgium, and then Australia. How did you feel about the relationships between English writing and yourself during these years? How did you express and position yourself in your writing? For example, you mentioned before that long time ago when you studied for your undergraduate in China, you somewhat passively [engaged with English writing]. You did not have personal</p>

	emotions/feelings towards English learning.
嘉宾：你说这个被动是指什么方面的？	A: what do you mean by 'passively'? Which perspectives do you refer to?
记者：学习啊，用啊，都是比较被动，就是没有什么感情。就是其实就是讨论一种你的感情你的想法，你对这个问题的想法。	R: [I mean] learning and using English in a passive way. Let's discuss about your feelings, your emotions on English writing and how you regard this issue.
嘉宾：我觉得这要看你写作的那个（task）是什么吧，因为在如果是。我不知道我正确理解你的意思没有，如果是在中国写那个英文的那种写作的时候，八成都是课堂上的那种（assignments），或者是就是应付考试的一些写作技巧啊之类的。我只是为了写而写，没有说我去做一个（research paper）那种感觉。然后比利时的时候也是，我觉得这有一个过渡阶段，当时还是倾向于中国那个方向，就是还是作为一个完成任务这么一个态度进行的。	A: I think it depends on <u>your writing tasks</u> / <u>what you write for</u> . I am not sure if I catch your meaning clearly—the English writings I did in China were mostly the assignments in class, or some exercises preparing me for exams..such as writing skills training. I write for writing. I never did a research. It's all the same [for me] to be in Belgium. I feel there is a progress ...at the beginning I was still apt to the Chinese habit—still an attitude to complete tasks.
记者：那你个人对此的感受怎么样呢？	R: So how do you feel about it?
嘉宾：我觉得谈不上什么情感，在某一些情况下，某一些（topic）下面我可能会肯定会有自己的。因为毕竟在，比如说在比利时那生活已经开始感受到了这种，西方和中国的这种（conflict）的文化，就是两种文化的那种碰撞，然后在又.....就是说能够触发这种（conflict）那种话题之下，你肯定会有强烈的意识到自己的（identity），然后把这种东西也注入进去。	A: Not so much. In some situations, I might have some personal interests. Anyway I have...for example, I started to feel the conflict between the western and Chinese cultures, and then.... definitely I have strong awareness of my own cultural identity, and then integrate such kind of feelings into [my writing].

## **Appendix 6: Explanatory Statement**

### **Chinese Postgraduate Students' English Academic Writing in Australia: Negotiating Practices and Identities**

My name is Wang Meihui and I am conducting a research project with Associate Professor Graham Parr in the Faculty of Education towards a PHD degree at Monash University. This means that I will write a thesis which is the equivalent of 300 page book.

The aim of this study is to explore how Chinese postgraduate students are learning to write in academic contexts. My research will investigate Chinese postgraduate students' experiences and views as they learn academic writing in English in order to help international students, especially Chinese students perusing academic life in Australia's academic communities and improve their English writing capabilities and academic skills. What is more, the research will contribute to research knowledge about L2 learning and deepen L2 educators' and teachers' understanding of L2 writing products and processes.

Chinese postgraduate students will be invited to participate in the research project through email, letter, and public advertisement in the international students' notice board at different faculties' buildings in different categories of universities in Melbourne. I will selectively choose 4-6 Chinese postgraduate students in different universities as my research participants. They should be taking Masters by coursework or research or PHD now. Because I want to report on a variety of perspectives of academic writing, I will take into account participants' backgrounds in terms of their age, gender, specialization, English language proficiency, and Chinese writing ability.

The study involves questionnaires which will need about fifteen minutes to finish and two audio-taped interviews which I will take a maximum of an hour for each. Participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. However, if you do consent to participate, you can withdraw at any time. I will use pseudonyms for participants in my thesis and all publications. I will ensure that data are reported without any particular individual being identified. Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and be kept on University premises in my locked filing cabinet for 5 years. Electronic files will be accessible only by using my password. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

If you want to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact Wang Meihui on [REDACTED]. If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspects of this study, please contact the Chief investigator: Associate Professor Graham Parr on (03)99052854 (office) or on email [REDACTED]

If you have a complaint concerning the matter in which this research is being conducted, please contact:

Human Ethics Officer

Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans(SCERH)  
Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800

[REDACTED]

Thank you.

Wang Meihui

Faculty of Education, Monash University

## **Appendix 7: Consent Form**

### **Chinese Postgraduate Students' English Academic Writing in Australia: Negotiating Practices and Identities**

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project as showed in the explanatory statement. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the explanatory statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

I agree to complete a questionnaire asking me about my attitudes and experiences of learning to write in Australian academic contexts. ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow the data provided by me to be used by the researcher in her future research projects. ☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview and questionnaire for use in thesis or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

I understand that all data from the research will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the researcher. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

Participant's name

Signature

Date