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Antonio Causarano

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And form for publication:

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**AN INVESTIGATION OF ACADEMIC WRITING IN INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENTS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**BY**

**ANTONIO CAUSARANO**

B.A., Foreign Languages, University of Messina Italy, 1999  
M.A., TESOL & Bilingual Education, The University of Findlay, 2002  
M.A., Special Education, The University of New Mexico, 2010

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**July, 2011**

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents that always encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams by deepening my analytical thinking in life. It also is dedicated to my brother who always supported me even though miles and miles away. This dissertation would not have been possible without the constant support and encouragement of my dear and lovely wife and my family in Taiwan and all the friends that constantly gave their time and efforts to make this dream possible.

My relatives in Sicily will always have a special place in my heart since they represented that love and affection that never dies with distance or time. They were always with me even though circumstances drove me far away from my birth place Sicily. Thank you for all your support along these years.

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I also want to thank Mr. Michael Schwartz for his support in the ESL 101 during the collection of data for the present study and the patience and understanding for the many questions and requests of clarification I had. His support is what made this study possible during the observations and collection of data during spring 2008.

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**ABSTRACT**

Writing and the power of the written word is a very important aspect of our literate society and writing is integrated into all aspects of our daily life. Good writing skills are paramount in social and educational institutions where textual production and related writing activities represent the main framework for knowledge production and dissemination (MacArthur, Graham, Fitzgerald, 2006). According to MacArthur et al. (2006), writing allows us to communicate with others who are removed by distance and time; it can foster and preserve a sense of heritage and purpose among larger groups of people, and can convey knowledge and ideas that represent an important and essential part of any sociocultural and educational system. Writing not only is representative of knowledge in a specific cultural and social system but also and more importantly, is fundamental for knowledge production and dissemination in any social, cultural and educational institution (Tolchinsky, 2006).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the acquisition of academic writing in international students by using Vygotsky's system of meaning as theoretical and methodological framework. The use of Vygotsky's theory was crucial to unfold the dynamic processes of academic writing in English as L2 in the participants in this study. The analysis of academic writing in English as L2 at the intersection of the sociocultural and cognitive is the first step in investigating academic writing by applying a more systematic theoretical lens in second language writing and writers.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Writing and the power of the written word is a very important aspect of our literate society and writing is integrated into all aspects of our daily life. Good writing skills are paramount in social and educational institutions where textual production and related writing activities represent the main framework for knowledge production and dissemination (MacArthur, Graham, Fitzgerald, 2006). According to MacArthur et al. (2006), writing allows us to communicate with others who are removed by distance and time; it can foster and preserve a sense of heritage and purpose among larger groups of people, and can convey knowledge and ideas that represent an important and essential part of any sociocultural and educational system. Writing not only is representative of knowledge in a specific cultural and social system but also and more importantly, is fundamental for knowledge production and dissemination in any social, cultural and educational institution (Tolchinsky, 2006).

Canagarajah (2002) contends that we must see writing as integrated “in the material world to orientate its troubling social function, the value-ridden nature of its constitution, and the conflicting motivations behind its production and reception” (p. 4). In particular, Canagarajah (2002) emphasizes five important characteristics of writing: (a) writing as situated where the text not only reflects reality but also constructs reality; (b) writing as social where the writer and the writing process are seen as dialogical and specifically situated in time and space; (c) writing as material is shaped out of a negotiation between the writer and its material resources in specific contexts in the act of writing; (d) writing as ideological as embodiment of values, a representation of reality, and a presentation of self in the text; (e)

writing as historical not as an inert object in a sociocultural space but as a dynamic process where disjuncture, fissures, struggles, and conflicts shape the architecture of the text and its reception in a community of readers and writers (p. 6).

According to Barton (1994) writing is not only an orthographic activity in which learners print letters on a page or screen but also is a meaningful selection and organization of experience where the writer uses written language to represent and communicate facts, opinions, experiences, and ideas relevant to his/her worldview. In other words, writing represents the material expression of the writer's thinking process in his/her construction of the architecture of the text (Adams, 2001, Arndt, 1993, Bean, 1996, Berkenhotter and Huckiu, 1995).

If writing holds a paramount importance for any social and cultural organization, writing academically in English as a second language presents more challenges and difficulties for those learners whose first language is not English and who study in a country where English represents the primary code of instruction, learning and communication.

Hyland (2003) writes:

Learning how to write in a second language is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning. Perhaps, is not surprising in view of the fact that even for those who speak English as a first language, the ability to write effectively is something that requires extensive and specialized instruction and which has consequently spawned a vast freshmen composition industry in American colleges and universities. Within the field of second and foreign language teaching, the teaching of writing has come to assume a much more central position than it occupied twenty or thirty years ago (p. xiii).

The importance and centrality of writing in L2 instruction is due to the role that the composition classes hold in American education and in U.S. institutions of higher education in particular. Scarcella (2003) points out that learning how to write in schools and learning academic writing for L2 learners in particular is paramount for this population in order to gain access to colleges and universities and successfully complete the requirements of the higher education curriculum in their specific field of study. Furthermore, Scarcella (2003) argues “Academic English is needed by all students...it represents advanced forms of English...Academic English is needed to challenge the tenets of those in power who use it” (p. 7). This means that L2 learners and writers need to become aware of and fully understand the language of academic communities if they want to access knowledge and not to be excluded from the “participation in educated society and to transforming it” (Scarcella, 2003, p.7).

The CCCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication) Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers (2001) presents important aspects on the status of scholarship on L2 writing and writers. In particular, two aspects are important here. The first contends that “Second-language writers are found in writing programs at all levels-from basic writing and first-year composition to professional writing and writing across the curriculum-as well as in writing centers” (p. 669). This means that L2 writers in the academia are not marginal. Instead, the presence and visibility of second language writers in North American institutions of higher education is increasing “As a result of colleges and universities actively seeking to increase diversity of the student population” (CCC Statement on Second-Language Writing and Writers, 2001 p. 669).

The second aspect concerns the special needs of L2 writer population “Second language writers—who have come from a variety of linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds may have special needs because the nature and functions of discourse, audiences, and persuasive appeals often differ across linguistic, cultural, and educational contexts” (CCC Statement 2001, p. 670). Therefore, as the statement points out “We...stress the need for further investigations into issues surrounding second-language writing and writers in the context of writing programs” (p. 670).

For the purpose of the present study, academic writing is defined as the ability of second language writers to write in academic contexts by applying academic writing conventions, rhetorical structures, lexicon, and standards of academic writing in U.S. institutions of higher education (Casanave, 2002). Academic writing standards, conventions, lexicon, and rhetorical structures are core components of writing in English that present challenges for L2 writers due to the different writing traditions and pedagogic practices L2 writers belong to (Casanave, 2002). Second language writers writing academically in a second language must be able to acquire and use specific rhetorical structures from the conventions of writing formal essays to reflective journals to formal research papers required in courses across the curriculum in U.S. institutions of higher education (Hyland, 2002).

Hyland (2004) points out that academic writing holds a paramount importance for students in higher education due to the role that this high specialized writing system has at the university level. According to Hyland (2004) the ability of the writer to use academic writing conventions, rhetorical structures, lexicon, and standards of academic writing eventually leads the academic writer to become part of a specific disciplinary knowledge accessible via academic writing. Moreover, as Hyland (2004) points out academic writing



helps the writer to construct an academic identity by using academic writing as a way to connect to specific disciplinary discourse. In doing so, students are able to develop academic relationships in their disciplines and to converse with the specialized knowledge their disciplines entails.

This study explores the applicability of Vygotsky's theoretical framework in studying the acquisition of academic writing in an ESL 101 course at the University of New Mexico in spring 2008. I will analyze the learning environment of the ESL 101 course in order to understand how the concepts of *perezhivanie* or social situation of development and *znachenie slova* are important for the acquisition of academic writing in English as L2 for the participants in this ESL 101 course. I will investigate how the specific learning environment affected the acquisition of academic writing in English as L2 for the participants in the study.

My goal is to explore how the interaction of the participants with the learning environment from instructor's rituals to the ability of the participants to become systematically involved in the process of acquisition of academic writing in English as L2 can be clarified by using Vygotsky's theoretical concepts in this study. Vygotsky's theoretical concepts represent the theoretical and methodological roadmap to explore how academic writing in English as L2 is acquired and used at the intersection of cognitive and sociocultural factors.

Canagarajah (2002) claims that such different writing tradition play a major role in determining the quality of academic writing in second language writers. In turn, the challenge for L2 writers using academic writing in English is to become proficient academic writers in a second language by being able to acquire and use academic writing conventions,

lexicon, and rhetorical structures in a different culture and language (Canagarajah, 2002). Moreover, Hyland (2003) claims that academic writing for second language writers is paramount to understand the ways in which fields or disciplines use academic writing to interpret knowledge and to become part of discourse communities in which such knowledge is communicated among its members.

As Hyland (2006) contends students and academics alike are judged by their control of the discourses of their disciplines: “it is these valued discourses which determine educational life chances regulate entry into professions, restrict passage through career pathways and have symbolic value in institutions” (p.31). This means that the present studies held a particular importance for the researcher in becoming aware and understand the importance of academic writing as L2 in the lives of the participants in the study related to their future decisions to complete their degree in an American University.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that represent the main focus of my study and guided my data collection and analysis are the following:

#### General Question:

How did the ESL 101 course support the participants’ acquisition of academic writing in English as L2?

#### Sub questions:

1. What does facilitate the acquisition of a system of meaning in the ESL 101 course?
2. How does the ESL 101 course academic environment support the acquisition of academic writing in English as L2 for the participants in the study?

3. What is the importance of subjective factors in the ESL 101 course for the acquisition of academic writing in English as L2 for the participants in the study?
4. What are the features of academic writing the participants incorporate in their thinking and doing in the ESL 101 course?

### **Significance of the Study**

To become proficient in a second language and to develop the ability to use writing in academic contexts is fundamental for students whose first language is not English. This is due to the importance of the academic disciplinary discourses in institutions of higher education and the larger society in the U.S. (Hyland, 2003). Furthermore, the acquisition of written language for second language writers is needed for accessing the broader and richer culture and knowledge of academic discourse communities that represent the centers of knowledge production and dissemination in any sociocultural organization.

Warschauer (2000) contends that the changing global economy will affect the teaching of English and the way L2 learners will acquire and use written English. He writes ...Changes are occurring and will continue to occur, with respect to writing (Bolter, 1996; Faigley, 1997). In much of the world, writing has been given little emphasis in English language courses and, if emphasized at all, is seen as synonymous with putting grammatically correct sentences on paper (p. 522).

Thus, my study investigated the importance of academic writing in international students and the academic writing system they have to learn and use in U.S. universities to understand, acquire, and use academic writing in different genres in the ESL 101 course at the University of New Mexico.

A second aspect that I investigated in my study is the way in which institutions of higher education are preparing international students to become active and critical participants of higher education discourse communities in which knowledge is produced and distributed via the use of a high specialized language defined as academic English. As Canagarajah (2002) explains

Though ESOL students are not total strangers to academic English discourses (which enjoys global hegemony), they are not insiders to these communities. The fact that they have some awareness of these discourse rules doesn't mean that they can presume to be comembers of the target community. Moreover, (passive) competence in academic discourses shouldn't be mistaken for mastery in performance... Definitely, students from the dominant communities enjoy a head start in academic literacies, as the discourses of their family and social groups are closer to those of the academy. (pp.168-169)

My investigation delved into the relationship between academic writing, L2 writers, and the academic support international students are receiving in US universities. Finally, I investigated how a critical understanding of international students' needs in academic environments can help instructors in colleges and universities develop academic writing interventions sensitive to the different nature of L2 writing and writers (Silva, 1993) to create systematic and effective support for international students during their first year transitional stage in US universities and support their successful completion of a University degree in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Nature of Academic Writing**

Academic writing is a highly specialized genre of writing that requires students to become aware of and understand its processes and requirements (Scarcella, 2003). Zhu (2004) contends that academic writing is a “specialized literacy that consists of the ability to use discipline-specific rhetorical and linguistic conventions to serve the purposes of the writer” (p. 29). Students and L2 writers in specifics need to acquire a new way of writing that is different from the conventions of other genres of writing in their L1. As Zhu (2004) points out academic writing becomes the medium students in higher education to access and acquire knowledge in different disciplines or fields of study.

For L2 writers coming from other countries, the ability to acquire academic writing becomes very important. International students as L2 writers need to understand the importance of the nature of academic writing in US institutions of higher education in formal instruction in the context of academic writing courses in colleges and universities. Lillis & Turner (2001) point out that L2 writers understand the importance of academic writing in English via formal instruction where they learn the linguistic and rhetorical forms of writing within specific academic genres such as research papers, persuasive essays, reflective writing, reports and the like.

As Ferris and Hedgcock (2004) suggest, many international students face great challenges when they have to use unfamiliar rhetorical and language structures that belong to a specific genre of writing, specifically academic writing. Ferris and Hedgcock (2004) point out that the main purpose of academic writing course must be for instructors to support

international students in acquiring and applying specific writing conventions that academic writing in English requires in order to be successful in the academia.

Geisler (1994) suggests instead that academic writing goes beyond linguistic boundaries and takes into account a sociocultural dimension of academic literacy, which allows students to become part of specific academic discourses in their disciplines.

According to Geisler (1994) international students not only acquire the academic conventions needed to produce academic writing but also, and more importantly, become part of specific areas of academic discourse and knowledge. What Geisler (1994) suggests is that academic language and culture are not two different entities but merge together in creating the opportunity for international students as L2 writers to become part of what can be defined as academic discourse communities and gain the ability to socially interact within these communities ( Hyland, 2004).

Hyland (2004) maintains that academic literacy in its own nature is a genre that presents significant structural and linguistic variations across disciplines and these variations must be acquired and used by students in higher education. Hyland (2004) points out that variation in academic writing as a genre demonstrates that different discursive practices and communicative expectations bring to the fore what type of knowledge counts in different disciplines and how this knowledge is communicated and shared among the members of different academic disciplines. What Hyland (2004) points out is of crucial importance for international students since the ability and opportunity to acquire academic writing in formal instructional contexts become paramount to enter into not only specific discursive practices but the knowledge this discursive practices entail.

Carson (2001) contends that academic writing as a highly specialized genre of writing in academic disciplines asks students to learn complex communicative roles in disciplinary discourses in order to become aware of, and to understand, the communicative expectations of the disciplines, and to be able to assume a specific academic role via academic writing. Academic writing asks students to acquire a different way of thinking and relating to knowledge, that is, a way of thinking and relating to the knowledge of their disciplines (Hyland, 2002).

The nature of academic writing as a highly specialized literacy genre is discussed in detail by Bruce (2008). Bruce argues that academic writing as a highly specialized literacy genre entails the concept of discourse competence on the part of the student. Bruce (2008) writes:

Discourse competence...involves writers developing the ability to integrate a wide range of different types of knowledge in order to create extended written discourse that is both linguistically accurate and socially appropriate...Thus, for many teachers, a major focus of their work is on preparing learners to cope with the language requirements and, in particular, the writing requirements of university courses (p. 1).

What Bruce (2008) contends is that the knowledge that students in higher education acquire, is embedded in academic writing across disciplines. More importantly, academic writing works as a catalyst to systematize knowledge within language structures and disciplinary discursive conventions.

Russell (2002) investigates the emergence of academic writing and its nature in institutions of higher education in the United States from a historical perspective. According to Russell (2002) academic writing represents the triumph of specialization of knowledge in

the various disciplines in higher education as a way of embedding knowledge in specific sociocultural and sociohistorical boundaries. Russell (2002) maintains that academic writing as a highly specialized language of United States academia also represents the efforts of academic disciplines to create, maintain, and develop high professional knowledge as a distinctive discourse practice only accessible to those belonging to the discipline in question. This means, from the perspective of international students writing academically in English, that these students must acquire and use an often new and challenging system of writing and communication in their disciplines to access the specialized knowledge embedded in academic writing. Hyland (2004) and Russell (2002) show us second language writers in the process of acquiring a new system of writing in a second language to access knowledge related to their disciplines and to acquire a new academic culture, a new system of academic thinking, and discursive practices that are new and different from their L1 language and culture (Cummings, 2006).

According to Leki, Cummings and Silva, (2006) second language writers make sense of the nature of academic writing by constantly negotiating their cultural and linguistic knowledge in L1 with the nature and goals of academic writing in L2. Mitchell and Myles (2004) and Csizerand and Dornyei (2005) suggest that learning a second language and writing academically in a second language is by nature related to the individual characteristics of the learner or second language writer. According to these scholars, these characteristics include proficiency in L2, the cultural orientations of the learner, prior knowledge and purposes of learning. These variables affect second language writers' perceptions of the nature of academic writing the meaning that academic writing in a second language has for them.



Cumming (2004) and Cumming and Riazi (2000) suggest that the landscape of second language writing and writers is not uniform and coherent in nature due to the characteristics of second language writers that inform and inhabit it. The main issue here is that second language writing is growing as a field of inquiry. Second language writing research is a field of study that has been evolving as an area of inquiry due to the intersection of different traditions of study regarding the writing process (Matsuda, 2003). Due to its interdisciplinary nature, second language writing research promises to shed light on the complex processes of writing in a second language and to support the writing process of second language writers.

Researchers can investigate second language writing and writers by looking at the writing goals that second language writers share in academic settings. Malle, Moses and Baldwin (2001) see goals as an integral part of what second language writing is and should be in academic contexts. Harklau (2002) and Hornberger (2003) maintain that by looking at second language writers' personal agency and motivation in relation to their goal of being part of a particular academic community are crucial. By shifting the theoretical and methodological lens to investigating goals and agency in second language writers in academic contexts, we can look at the nature of second language writing in academic contexts by focusing on the individual writer and by assessing his/her specific academic writing goals through looking at variables that are stable over time (Harklau, 2002, Hornberger, 2003).

### **Academic Writing and its Contexts**

Pintrich (2000) and Zimmermann (2001) discuss the importance of focusing on the individual to better understand the characteristics of the individual learner in order to become

aware of and understand how the learner develops specific abilities to acquire knowledge in particular contexts. Pintrich (2000) and Zimmermann (2001) point out that scholars should focus their attention on the individual's learning conditions, the specific pedagogy used to support and enhance the individual's learning, and how the individual is able to adapt and readapt his/her goals to the contextual learning situation.

If we apply Pintrich's (2000) and Zimmermann's (2001) approaches to second language writing and writers, we see that the nature of academic writing is always related to the second language writer and how he/she uses academic writing as a complex system of writing in particular context of learning or environments (Mahn, 2008). In Vygotskian terms, academic writing in a second language happens in an interaction with the sociocultural environment of the L2 writer in academic contexts (Mahn, 2008).

Academic writing as a highly specialized linguistic and cultural system in a second language writing context cannot be merely investigated just by looking at the language structures of academic writing. The investigator must consider the interaction between the L2 writer and the academic environment in which academic writing happens (Yang, Baba, and Cumming, 2004, Witte and Haas, 2005). This means that the investigation of academic writing in a second language must take into account both the writer and the system in which academic writing is used.

What is important here is that L2 writers do not merely use academic writing passively but, rather, begin to interact with the academic writing system in a way that allows them to understand the system and use it to produce meaning in writing. Mahn (2008) suggests that for the adolescent, this entails a qualitative transformation that indicates a more complex interaction with the environment or as Mahn (2003) writes, "The adolescent [the

individual] thinks in concepts and perceives and understands social reality in its interconnectedness, as a system of systems” (p. 134) Mahn (2003) points out that every time that the individual interact with a system or environment both the system and the individual present qualitative transformations.

Academic writing, including in second language contexts, stem from an interaction between the writer and the writing contexts, which leads to qualitative transformations both in the writer and in the academic writing system (Mahn, 2008). Studies of academic writing and L2 writers that look at the interaction between the L2 writer and writing context show the qualitative transformation of the L2 writer and academic writing, which, in turn, allows us to see academic writing as a qualitative process that takes place in the system and the L2 writer at the same time.

The study of academic writing and the L2 writer allows us to become aware and understand that writing academically in a second language is not just imitation and reproduction of linguistic and cultural conventions but a constant and active interaction between the second language writers and the process of writing in a second language by using different cultural, social, and individuals characteristics (Matsuda, 2003).

It is this continuous interaction between the second language writer and the genre of academic writing that is crucial for a better and more in-depth understanding of the complex nature of academic writing in a second language. As Nassaji and Cumming (2000) and Goldstein (2004) argue, second language writing in academic contexts must be investigated by taking into account a more complex and systematic perspective where teaching, learning, and individual characteristics of L2 writing and writers can demonstrate a more specific and better picture of second language writing and writers in academic contexts.

To investigate academic writing in a second language, investigated by looking at the interaction of the writer with the context in which writing is produced is to approach the study of second language writing and L2 writers by looking at the complexity of the process of writing in a second language. Mahn (2008) contends that is the core of any qualitative transformation in the individual interacting with the system. What this means for L2 writers and writing academically in a second language is that qualitative transformation cannot be predicted but must be investigated in its unfolding through time and by looking at the individual L2 writer in his/her process of writing in a second language interacting with the environment during the process of writing.

The nature of academic writing and writers is not a process in which stages of acquisition allow second language writers to develop in a linear and rote fashion but, rather, is more a continual attempt to understand a specific system of writing and the production of meaning (Mahn,2008) To help second language writers learn how to write academically in a second language, we must support them in their acquisition and use of academic writing in English by exposing them to rich writing contexts in academic settings and by allowing them to write using different academic genres (Atkinson, 2002).

The nature of academic writing and writers discussed here presents a complex system that challenges a linear view of writing academically in a second language, a process wherein second language writers acquire a highly specialized genre without any interference at the cultural, social, and individual level. Writing academically in a second language is a process in which different systems in the culture, language, and individual characteristics of second language writers intersect and change over time (Cumming, Busch and Zhou, 2002). The investigation of the nature of academic writing in second language writers presents

challenges that scholars are beginning to tackle in order to delve into the dynamic and intricate characteristics of second language writing and writers (Dornyei, 2003).

### **Features in Academic Writing**

**Feedback in L2.** Feedback in educational settings is considered crucial for supporting students and helping them internalize their learning. Atkinson (2004) claims that feedback in second language writing is important to support L2 writers in their effort to understand the process of writing academically. Atkinson (2004) points out that written feedback in particular is important for L2 writers to give good models upon which to rely when they must reflect on their writing process. For example, Atkinson (2004) suggests that written feedback should focus not only on grammar correction but on providing clear guidance to the L2 writer on the overall process of writing academically, from form to organization of ideas on paper. (Benesch, 2000; Flowerdew, 2000). Hyland and Hyland (2006) contend that feedback in second language writing is “a key element of the students’ growing control over composition skills...by employing scaffolded learning techniques” (p.1). Feedback is seen within this framework as an important two-way communication between teacher and student to help develop the “student’s future writing and the development of his or her writing processes” (Hyland and Hyland, 2006, p.1).

The present literature review will address central and often complex aspects of feedback in L2 writing and will present an overview of some of the important issues that inform the field of feedback in L2 writing. The rationale behind my choices is based on my goal of presenting an overview of the field and addressing what the literature has to say on feedback in L2 writing.

**Historical context.** The importance of feedback in writing courses and instruction developed in the 1970s in conjunction with the development of learner-centered approaches to writing in the field of L1 composition classes (Bartholomae, 1986; Goldstein, 2004). According to Bartholomae (1986), process approaches emphasized the importance of teacher-student interaction around written texts. In turn, in the learner-centered approach method, the teacher's role in supporting students in their writing had to go beyond mere notes in paper margins and to focus on supporting the writer through multiple drafts to the final product by giving feedback to clarify and refine the writing process for the learner. Feedback became important because it enabled the instructor to construct, develop, and refine a communication loop between the writer and an expert literate learner during the process of writing (Goldstein, 2004).

Goldstein (2004) points out that within the learner-centered approach, traditional feedback came to be viewed as having powerful potential, with the possibility for “a revision of cognition itself that stems from response” (p. xi). What this means for the teacher and the learner/student is the possibility of delving into the fabric of the text and the emergence of the text in the process of writing, and of going beyond the mere surface of the text to work on the deeper layers of meaning that it presents. Donato (2000) claims feedback helps the writer understand how to circle back and explore areas of the text at a deeper level of reflection and comprehension. The deeper level of the text is where meaning resides and where feedback helps the writer refine his/her ability to present content in a more specific and clear way.

During the 1970s, feedback practices and issues were heavily influenced by interactionist theories that emphasized the importance of the individual reader and the

dialogic nature of writing (Hyland, 2003). As Hyland (2003) contends, students writing in the interactionist tradition were asked to produce a text not for a general audience but as a response to a specific reader. This was deemed important due to the interactionist tradition on meaning and, more importantly, was intended to support the student writer in constructing his/her text for real people instead of for idealized abstract ones. As Johnston (2003) argues writing for meaning is what any writer aims for. Meaning is seen as what a writer wants and needs to communicate when he/she engages with writing in any context. Mahn (2008, p.3) contends that meaning is the unification of thinking and speech processes. When considering this aspect of the writing process, we must look at writing in L2 as a unification of thinking and written symbols, which supports the writer's production of meaning in a specific sociocultural context. Mahn (2008) demonstrates that readers and writers are always seeking to construct meaning within cultural and social contexts. Meaning cannot be produced by a writer if a text is not oriented toward a physical or real reader or audience who will eventually interact with the text. As Hyland and Hyland (2006) point out, "This perspective places a high value on reader response and encourages the use of peer feedback and multiple feedback sources to provide a real rather than a visualized audience" (p. 2).

Feedback has been considered an important component of writing instruction due to its importance in helping students to develop and refine control of their writing and to acquire the capability to become independent learners through scaffolding (Benesch, 2001; Prior, 2001). As Chaiklin (2003) points out, Vygotsky supported the idea of a zone of proximal development in the process of learning. Writing, in particular, lends itself to an application of the ZPD via feedback. In particular, sociocultural theories within the Vygotskian tradition in education have exerted great influence on reconceptualizing the use

of feedback in writing, focusing attention on providing students with “the rhetorical choices central to new academic or professional literacy skills and as a way of assisting students in negotiating access to new knowledge and practices” (Hyland & Hyland, 2006, p. 2). In so doing, the context of writing, students, and teachers becomes part of a continuous and evolving process of learning where the social, cultural, and subjective variables of learning are used to their full potential.

A sociocultural theory of learning focused on the importance of feedback in L2 helps investigators see writing as a dialogic process where feedback functions as clarification signposts for the learner/writer (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). What this means is that the written words on the page are not fixing the process of writing forever but acquire a dynamic nature that helps the writer refine his/her process of writing over time using feedback as support (Prior, 2001).

Bazerman and Prior (2005) and Prior (2006, p. 55) delineate the key tenets of the sociocultural theory of writing as follows: (a) writing is situated in concrete interactions that are; (b) simultaneously improvised locally, and; (c) mediated by prefabricated, historically provided tools and practices. What this means is that writing and the writer do not write in a vacuum or an idealized world of communication but in a situated context that is historically and socially informed by different voices and layers of meaning that respond to each other continuously since the writing situation and the context in which the writing takes place ask the writer to continuously rethink why the writing is being used and for what purposes. Moreover, writing and its different layers of meaning are created by the writer who uses his/her knowledge to understand what to write, for what purposes, and for whom. The writer



brings to the writing process different experiences that will find a place in the writing process and in the final product that the writer produces (Prior, 2006). As Prior (2006) writes,

Sociocultural approaches to writing reject the simple equation of writing with material texts or acts of inscription, seeing writing as chains of short- and long-term production, representation, reception, and distribution. Writing involves dialogic processes of invention. Texts, artifacts-in-activity, and the inscription of linguistic signs in some medium are parts of streams of mediated, distributed, and multimodal activity (pp. 58-59).

In this context, feedback becomes the thread between the writer, the instructor, and the sociocultural context of writing, where the act of using written language is seen as collaborative, circular, and continuously evolving beyond the fixed surface of the written text.

As Hyland and Hyland (2006, p. 2) contend, key questions must be answered in order to give the field of feedback in L2 more specific and clear answers regarding: (a) what kinds of feedback are most appropriate in different contexts? (b) What teachers' practices are most effective? (c) How do cultural factors influence response? And does feedback improve writing in the long term? These questions are crucial for teachers (Burke and Pieterick, 2010) working with students who come from diverse cultural and social contexts and who have different and often unpredictable modes of responding to writing feedback in L2 writing classes. By pondering the above questions, teachers of L2 writing can respond better to the needs and demands of L2 writers in English settings. The importance of written feedback (Burke and Pieterick, 2010) lies in the impact that written feedback has on the performance of the writer. As Burke and Pieterick (2010) claim written feedback is important to research

since it can give instructors and students the ability to create a more supportive writing process and can help students become better writers via reflective thinking.

In conclusion, the succinct historical overview presented here is important in setting the stage for further analysis of issues in feedback in L2 writing and for helping us become more aware of and understand the importance of providing better support and developing more specific and clear communication in L2 writing classes where cultural, social, and individual differences play a major role in the students' acquisition of L2 writing and the instructor's ability to support students during the writing process. As such, feedback becomes an important part of writing processes in second language writing, where the L2 writer has opportunities to continually refine his/her writing by reflecting on feedback provided by the instructor. Feedback works as the external voice of the instructor to guide the second language writer towards a better use of writing in academic contexts (Zhu, 2001).

**Key issues in L2 writing feedback.** The literature on written feedback in L2 writing classes indicates that ESL students prefer a teacher's written feedback more than other forms of feedback delivery (Bitchener, 2008; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hyland, 2003). According to these researchers L2 writers need to receive clear feedback during the process of writing. They need to have a specific writing map to orient their academic writing in L2 in a way that helps them refine the way in which they use this specific system of writing to construct meaning. This line of inquiry indicates that a consistent number of ESL students find written comments to be effective in the acquisition of academic writing in the medium of English. Williams (2002) and Burke and Pieterick (2010) point out that written feedback gives writers, and second language writers in particular, the ability to reflect back on their writing

and connect with the writing process in more depth. What Williams (2002) and Burke and Pieterick (2010) suggest is that feedback supports reflective writing and provides a systematic means for the writer to refine his/her writing. Feedback in the form of written comments helps the L2 writer to always circle back to his/her own writing and refine the writing process in a more systematic way

Conrad and Goldstein (1999) investigated the relationship between written comments and students' revisions in college classrooms, writing,

The study shows that, in order to understand how students revise in response to written feedback, we must look not only at the nature of the comments themselves, but also at the types of problems students are being asked to revise and at individual factors affecting the students (p.147).

What is relevant here is that students must receive feedback and support that are delivered through one medium and that take into account different variables such as students' specific needs in the writing process, their different learning styles, and the language used in writing feedback, so that students can develop their capability to revise their writing in a second language.

Conrad and Goldstein (1999, p.173) contend that three important implications can be drawn from their study: (a) feedback must help students develop complex writing skills in the areas of analysis, explanation, and explicitness; (b) L2 students must be able to interpret teacher feedback in a way that can support them in a more in-depth and focused process of revision of their writing; (c) the data collected by the teacher from various forms of feedback

should lead toward better designed writing courses that meet L2 students' needs in their process of acquiring academic writing. As Conrad and Goldstein (1999) write,

Courses need to be designed so that students are able to gain the content that they need to write effective papers. If students are asked to write a paper that takes a position, but are not asked to conduct research or are not warned away from topics that they do not know thoroughly, they are almost certain to have trouble revising their papers to support their claims. We advocate composition classrooms that are designed around content in the first place, so that students gain information they can use as evidence for their papers (p.174).

Therefore, feedback in L2 writing classes should be directed and used towards helping L2 writers in developing and refining strategies to improve their writing and allowing them to become independent writers through thoroughly developing their analytical thinking in the writing process. In other words, feedback is a key component of teaching second language writing and is one important feature, among many others in the field of second language writing, in teaching academic writing to L2 writers. Good feedback can support L2 writers' efforts to learn to write in a different language by addressing the different cultural, social, and individual characteristics of each student writer (Hyland, 2000).

A key issue that emerges from an analysis of feedback in L2 writing is the importance of understanding what type of feedback to provide L2 students in the composition classroom. It is important to point out that feedback delivery should be correlated with students' learning styles because of the close relationship between feedback and the ways in which students learn to write. In particular, instructors should use language and format that students can

easily relate to and understand. This means that feedback in the form of written comments should not be the same for each student (cookie-cutter style) but should be modeled and delivered according to the student's learning style and comprehension level in L2. Saito (1994) contends that teachers should pay close attention to students' learning styles in order to model feedback according to the students' process of acquisition, retention, and application of relevant knowledge. Saito (1994) found that explicit feedback is an important factor in supporting L2 students in their revision processes and in their further development of writing in English as L2 in terms of form, content, and communication purposes. Saito (1994) summarizes her findings as follows:

ESL teachers may need to state more clearly the purposes of their feedback, the strategies that students should use for handling feedback, and the benefits that students would potentially derive. At the same time, teachers should pay careful attention to what their students feel toward their instructional methods and find out whether there are any differences in opinion between the teachers and the students in this regard, attempting to resolve such discrepancies appropriately (p. 66).

The important findings of this study by Saito (1994) help us to become aware of, and understand the importance of, teacher-student communication in the design and delivery of feedback that is supportive of L2 writers in composition classrooms. Furthermore, the present study leads us to consider the dimension of feedback in L2 writing as a key issue in the positive and successful use of feedback in L2 writing courses.

Zhang (1995) found that the affective advantage of teacher-student feedback leads to more, and more effective, delivery of important and relevant knowledge to L2 writers during

their process of prewriting, drafting, evaluating, and revising. Zhang (1995) discusses the findings of her study by pointing out the importance of the affective, cognitive, and social dimensions of feedback in L2 writing, which have a positive effect on L2 writers in their efforts to learn to write in a second language (see also Hyland, 2003; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Ferris, 2002). These scholars support the research by Zhang (1995) on teacher-student feedback, suggesting that writing and feedback inform each other. Writing as a process must have a system of support grounded in reflective thinking and writing that support L2 writers during their process of writing. However, Zhang (1995) is also aware that more research is needed in order to specify an effective approach to feedback in L2 writing. She writes:

It would be premature to make any definitive pedagogical recommendation to substitute one type of feedback for another solely on the basis of what has been reported in this article. Future studies are needed to determine what reasons, real or perceived, are behind the preferences observed, to what extent the preferences are amenable to teacher manipulation, and most importantly, whether promotion of one preference over another is a necessary or sufficient condition for better ESL writing (p. 220).

Nevertheless, the nature of feedback in L2 writing is a key issue in the literature, which must be taken into account when considering delivery of feedback to L2 writers who present differences in cultures of learning in relation to teacher-student interaction, ways of learning, and the use of writing in diverse settings and with different pedagogic and academic expectations from L1 writers.

Another key issue in the area of feedback in L2 writing is error correction of L2 students' written products even though the majority of the literature on feedback (Chandler 2003; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Bitchener, 2008) addresses research on the importance of using feedback to support writers' abilities to understand the connection between form and content in the process of writing. These researchers contend that is not sufficient to address or overemphasize one aspect over the other but to give writers the ability to see how form and content work together in the construction of meaning. Feedback in L2 writing should find a balance between giving in-depth comments and keeping the language clear and specific enough for the L2 writer to be able to understand how to improve his/her written product (Truscott, 2007). By discussing this specific type of feedback in depth, we will be able to become aware of and to understand both its importance and its limitations, and to contextualize it within the research area of feedback in L2 writing before focusing on different methods of delivery of feedback in L2 writing environments.

As Truscott (2007) argues, feedback should not be oriented toward grammar correction or form but toward content and how to better organize the content in order to support L2 writers during the writing process. Chandler (2003) and Bitchner (2008) point out that too often instructors use feedback to address the surface level of a text without taking into account the importance of discussing how to help L2 writers see the connection between good form and good content in the process of writing.

The first important point to be discussed here in relation to error correction in L2 writing is the degree of tolerance that university faculty in the United States have for errors in writing. In a study carried out by Janopoulos (1992) error tolerance has been investigated by

comparing the tolerance that university faculty in the United States for native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS). Janopoulos found that university faculty in the United States are more tolerant of NNS' writing errors than of NS' errors. Janopoulos comments on the negative impact that such an attitude can have on NNS of English in relation to performance standards in writing at the college level. This is due to seeing errors in academic writing as negatively impacting grades, but also, and more importantly, the attitude toward academic writing that NNS of English can develop.

Janopoulos (1995) suggests that "a kind of double standard may exist with regard to faculty tolerance of NNS writing errors" (p.116). He writes

The possibility that university faculty employ a more lenient set of standards when evaluating the written work of NNS students is, by itself, not necessarily worrisome. After all, many faculty members may feel perfectly justified in overlooking writing errors that do not significantly lessen a NNS student's ability to demonstrate mastery of course content...What is needed now is for additional research to provide a more complete picture of university faculty tolerance to NNS writing errors (p. 118).

What is important to point out here is that error in L2 writing continues to be an important and pervasive aspect of L2 writing instruction and pedagogy due to the fact that many NNS have been trained to be aware of their errors in writing in their own cultures and to polish their writing accordingly. This cultural and individual aspect of L2 writing must not be underestimated by university faculty in the United States since many NNS consider error correction in their papers as a sign of attention to their written work (Ferris, 2002, Ferris and Roberts, 2001).



Truscott (1999), in his study of grammar correction in L2 writing classes, argues that L2 writers benefit from error feedback based on pointing out grammar errors to help them to become more aware of, understand and improve their writing in their writing courses and beyond. Truscott (1999) contends that the degree of correction of L2 writing errors must be a teacher's personal decision, but that error correction must be an aspect of feedback in L2 writing courses due to its importance in helping L2 writers improve their writing in a second language and become more proficient in content areas across the curriculum.

According to Truscott (1999) teachers must constantly make decisions about what to do, and what not to do, in their classes. As Truscott (1999) writes,

These decisions are necessarily made under conditions of uncertainty; research never puts an end to doubt. But the choices still must be made, and made constantly. So, given the world as it is, the best we can hope for is that teachers will look seriously at the case against grammar correction, compare it to the case for correction, decide which is stronger, and then incorporate that decision in their teaching (p.121).

In short, teachers make the final decision about how much they want to emphasize error correction after highlighting the errors in their L2 writing classes according to important variables such as the cultural, social, pedagogical, and individual differences of their students and about how they respond to error correction.

A counter voice within the literature of error correction is the study by Semke (1984). Semke (1984) carried out this study at the University of Minnesota with 141 first-year German students and found that error correction is not a relevant variable in student progress in their writing practices. He writes,

...The findings of this research to classroom procedures would mean that the amount of writing assigned, since correction does not appear to promote competency, can be based on what is best for student learning, and need not be determined by the amount of time and energy a teacher has to correct it...This does not mean that corrections should never be made. When a teacher notes consistent errors, they can be explained and drilled. When students ask for correction, it can be given. Released from the burden of feeling compelled to find every error, teachers can exercise personal discretion in making corrections (p.202)

What this means is that the degree of correction should be reduced to a minimum and should be made upon request. What remains unclear in Semke's (1984) study is the degree of awareness L2 writers have of their errors in writing when a teacher does not provide basic strategies to find and correct them. What I want to point out here is that many L2 writers are not always aware of errors since many factors intervene and cloud their ability to find these errors. Linguistic, rhetorical, cultural, and individual factors can make the finding of errors in L2 writing very difficult and frustrating at times (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Myles, 2002). This line of research claims that feedback should be delivered in a balanced way to the writer.

What Ferris & Hedgcock (2005) suggest is that feedback in written form should be delivered with the idea of specificity in mind. Feedback should mirror the writer's areas of need and support the writer in his/her efforts to intervene and refine his/her writing. According to Ferris & Hedgcock (2005), feedback should only address the L2 writer's specific areas of need. These scholars point out that feedback in written form should always

be made using language that allows the writer to have a specific map of the written product and should provide a detailed context for the writer in which to refine his/her writing.

Feedback should be able to scaffold the writer's efforts in the process of writing.

Schachter (1991) discusses corrective feedback from a historical perspective in order to address the most salient and compelling issues in the literature. Schachter (1991) argues that by looking at the literature on feedback from a historical perspective, we can become aware of and understand controversies and different currents of thought that have shaped the field and created opportunities for critical reflection on compelling pedagogical issues in L2 writing. Schachter (1991) calls our attention to the fact that feedback has never been a unitary, coherent, and unambiguous concept in the field of language pedagogy or, even more so, in L2 writing. According to this scholar, feedback has spawned a myriad of controversies due to its complex nature, as informed by teachers' preferences for specific types of feedback and, more importantly, to the variegated nature of the learner who carried unique cultural, social, linguistic, and individual characteristics to L2 writing classroom. In turn, the concept of feedback changes in form, content, and application according to the nature of the teacher-student relationship and the classroom in which it is used as a pedagogical strategy to support L2 writers in their learning process.

Hyland (1998), in her study of teachers' written feedback to individual writers, found that written feedback from teachers varies "due to individual differences in needs and student approaches to writing" (p. 255). These findings support the thesis that no one type of feedback can be used in L2 writing classes. As Hyland (1998) writes,

To help prevent miscommunication, teachers and students should talk together in detail about their aims and expectations with regard to feedback. Teachers need to allocate some time for face-to-face discussion with the individual student on feedback issues, to gain an awareness of the student's perspective and an understating of what each individual student brings with them to the course in terms of past experiences and expectations. It is also possible for discussion on the various types of feedback to take place in small peer groups, so that students can make comparisons with their classmates (p. 280).

Thus, feedback in L2 writing classes should be designed from the bottom-up or by taking into account the nature of the L2 writers who are physically in the classroom rather than on the ideal L2 writer, or according to the personal preferences of the teacher for one type of feedback or another. Communication between teacher and student is paramount in using this approach to feedback in L2 writing courses since, as Hyland (1998) points out, the more we know about students' preferences on the type of feedback they prefer, the better we will design effective and supportive ways of helping L2 writers learn and use writing in a second language in different contexts and with a higher degree of precision in form, content, and meaning.

The effectiveness of feedback in L2 writing classes based solely on error correction has been widely questioned by researchers working within the framework of process writing. Hyland (2000) points out that L2 writer do not benefit from this kind of feedback and proposes that teachers must change student attitudes towards the benefits of error correction by supporting and advocating for a correction free approach in their classrooms.

The above findings are relevant for our discussion on feedback in L2 since they further support the importance of giving students different types of feedback as a way to try to give L2 writers a wider and more comprehensive perspective on their writing process that goes beyond the mere error marking on their papers. In other words, error feedback should not represent the only and primary method of feedback in L2 writing classes but one choice among many others.

Hyland and Hyland (2006), however, warn against the elimination of error feedback from ESL teachers in their classrooms. They argue that while it is true that L2 writers must develop confidence in writing in a second language without being heavily corrected on the errors they make, it is also true that “errors can be an obvious problem for L2 writers, and it is not surprising that teachers often feel the need to respond to them” (p.3).

Hyland (2003) contends that many ESL students come from cultures where teachers deliver their instruction based an emphasis on error analysis and correction, and that many L2 students expect teachers to notice and comment on their errors to show that they are concerned with students’ writing. Furthermore, Hyland (2003) points out that many students who are learning to write for business or academics see accuracy as paramount in learning to write in a second language. Finally, studies carried out in college-level classrooms have found that teachers have a very low tolerance for ESL writers and their typical grammar errors which, in turn, affect their grading of L2 writers. In particular, Janopolous (1992) contends that tolerance for grammar error is very low among college instructors since grammar is seen as an important factor in writing accuracy in college composition classrooms.

The key issues explored here show that feedback in L2 writing presents controversial points (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). These scholars do not present any conclusive ideas about how writing instructors can best deliver feedback. They contend that feedback should be contextualized according to the writing situation and the specific characteristics of the writer. . Also, research on feedback in second language writing (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hyland, 2003) still presents debates on how to design better research to address important cultural, social, and individual variables that affect the efficacy of feedback to students who come from very different sociocultural backgrounds and must cope with writing in a second language in an often very different educational environment. It seems that researchers should collect and analyze more data about cultural, social, and individual variables that play a crucial role in feedback in L2, and then propose different and more efficacious ways of helping L2 writers become proficient in writing in a second language.

**Writing conferences.** The research reviewed above indicates that feedback is effective in L2 writing if it is delivered in different modes according to students' learning styles and the circumstances in which the feedback is being used by the instructor. One often-used type of feedback is the writing conference. According to Freedman and Sperling (1985), writing conferences can be conceptualized as conversational dialogues that emphasize two-way communication. This means that, most importantly, writing conferences require constant negotiation and interpretation of meaning between the teacher and student on important points of the writing process or the text.

Williams (2002) claims that one major advantage of the writing conference is its interactive nature, which gives teachers the opportunity to respond to the different cultural,

individual, and writing needs of L2 writers by continually clarifying meaning, being able to reduce ambiguity in real time, and allowing L2 writers to have a voice in the revision process. In other words, writing conferences offer L2 writers the opportunity to gain a clearer idea of their strong and weak areas in writing in a second language (Hyland and Hyland, 2006).

The literature on writing conferences tends to stress careful planning by teachers due to the importance of giving students the opportunity to participate actively in improving their writing skills (Zamel, 1985, Patthey-Chavez and Ferris, 1997). What is important to keep in mind here is that the focus of a writing conference is not just to reduce the amount of written feedback for L2 writers but to create optimal conditions for having a lasting effect on helping L2 writers improve their writing in a second language in future writing tasks. Therefore, the L2 writing teacher needs to approach writing conferences with a different conceptual mindset, and to see the L2 writer as an interactive and paramount element in the process of developing proficiency in writing in a second language (Powers, 1993).

Williams (2002) claims that a consistent number of second language writers in college-level composition classes need support in order to overcome their writing blocks. This scholar argues strongly that little attention has been paid to the importance of writing conferences in writing centers in United States universities, where L1 writers get most of the attention from researchers and instructors. This lack of interest and research literature leads to poor knowledge of L2 writers' needs in higher education, where their cultural, social, and individual differences are important to take into consideration in designing and delivering adequate support across the curriculum. Fortunately, as Williams (2002) points out, writing

researchers are beginning to focus their attention on the needs of second language writers and their individual needs in writing centers where they can receive the one-to-one attention necessary to address specific problems related to their writing in a second language.

Ronesi (1995) suggests that second language writers need extra time and attention in order to complete composition assignments, and that, by receiving the necessary support in writing centers in their colleges or universities they can improve their writing in English as a second language. What Ronesi (1995) points out is that writing centers in institutions of higher education cannot ignore second language writers as an important part of their instructional and pedagogical strategies because United States colleges and universities have a high percentage of second language writers at both the undergraduate and graduate level. In other words, second language writers constitute an important aspect of writing pedagogy in higher education.

Harris (1997), in a study of second language writers in a writing center, found that L2 writers perceived that their tutors were more helpful, more supportive, and more practical than their teachers. This important finding leads us to see the role of writing centers for L2 writers in United States institutions of higher education as central in creating visible, strong, and reliable support for second language writers and their different needs in their process of mastering writing in a L2. Furthermore, as suggested by Tassoni (1998), the writing center does not only represent a place for supplementary instruction, but also, and more importantly, it is a center for primary instruction where second language writers gain more insights into the process of acquiring and using a different writing system from their L1.



Harris and Silva (1993) claim that it is important to become aware of and to understand how second language writers are not only in the process of learning to write in a second language but learning a second language at the same time. As Williams (2002) writes,

It is therefore essential for writing centers professionals to review what is known about their second language writer clients and to inform themselves about how they might better serve this population... The second language writers who come to writing centers do not have a monolithic profile. They come from a variety of social, linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds; and they have different goals for their long-term educational and professional development (pp. 74-75)

Therefore, writing centers, as sites for writing conferences, must rethink their role from a complex social, cultural, and educational perspective, taking into account that L2 writers represent one of the most important variables, when designing writing support in English or any other language. Also, writing tutors and instructors must become aware of and understand how writing in a second language is not based on simple, linear, and direct instruction but is a slow and often winding process where L2 writers are engaged in a multilayered metalinguistic system of learning that takes time to be internalized and used appropriately (Ohta, 2001, Severino, 1994).

Spack (1997) brings to our attention an important aspect of L2 writers and their process of learning to write in a second language. Spack (1997) contends that second language writers not only acquire a new language in written form but also, and more importantly, enter into a new discourse community in which they must master many other skills. It is important to point out here that writing does not happen in a vacuum, but is

always related to a specific context of meaning and communication. The writer, and the L2 writer in particular, is always in the process of acquiring graphic signs that enable him/her to put thoughts on paper and constantly dialoguing with a different system of values, beliefs, and communicative expectations that the disciplinary community has among its members (Leki, 1992, Matsuda, 1998).

Another important aspect of writing conferences that has been not fully addressed within our analysis of L2 writers and writing is the role of interaction between instructors and L2 writers. Williams (2002) argues that interaction is of paramount importance in writing conferences in L2 writing. According to Williams (2002), interaction is based on that part of sociocultural theory that draws heavily from the work of Lev Vygotsky. The body of work on sociocultural theory is based on the hypothesis that negotiation of meaning and scaffolding during the writing conference will help L2 writers acquire, internalize and use L2 writing more effectively. As Williams (2002) writes,

One of the first advantages attributed to negotiation is the increased comprehension of input...When learners participate in interaction; they are able to tailor the input to their own level of proficiency by signaling their interlocutors about language they do not understand. This is essential since comprehensible input is thought to be a prerequisite for acquisition. Second language writers are likely to have more access to such tailored input in tutoring sessions than in class since the input is addressed uniquely to them (p.81).

In the framework of Vygotskian theory, negotiation is considered to help second language writers understand how to communicate their needs and how to improve their

communicative patterns of interaction with instructors and tutors to focus attention on areas of writing that must be addressed in the acquisition, development, and use of a different system of meaning in a new language, in a different writing system where cultural, social, and discursive conventions present different and often unknown challenges for the second language writer. According to John-Steiner, Panofsky, and Smith (1994), social interaction is the context in which language mastery happens. John-Steiner et al. (1994) contend that language mastery happens when an interactionist approach is applied to the development of language skills. In other words, if an interaction between the learner and his/her environment is established, the learner experiences a logic-emotional interaction, or *perezhivanie* (Vygostky, 1993), which supports the learner's sociocultural development of language.

Swain (2001), in working within a Vygotskian theoretical framework, supports the idea that “verbalization mediates the internalization of external activity” (p.109). What this means for this discussion of the writing conference is that taking a Vygotskian approach can help the L2 writer to create a zone of proximal development in which his/her learning needs can be negotiated and clarified, and learning and acquisition of writing in L2 can take place. A zone of proximal development where dialogue becomes the main strategy for the L2 writer, and the instructor creates and maintains a communicative channel as an expert interlocutor who will help the novice accomplish tasks by a constant negotiation of meaning on important writing issues (Swain, 2001).

The discussion and analysis of the writing conference and its importance for L2 writers has taken into account the important aspect of constant negotiation through clear and unambiguous communicative strategies that allow the L2 writer and the instructor to create a

space in which to negotiate and clarify issues in L2 writing, which will eventually lead to overall improvement in writing in second language. What has been left out from the literature surveyed so far are issues of cross-cultural communication that can facilitate or prevent the instructor and the L2 writer from accomplishing important goals in the acquisition and use of writing in a second language.

Allei and Connor (1990) discuss this important aspect of writing conferences and collaboration, since they believe that without taking into account the differences in communication between individuals belonging to different cultures, we cannot effectively set the stage for positive and constructive support of second language writers in their process of acquiring a written system in a second language. When communication happens in writing conferences between the instructor and the second language writer, cultural factors that can support or impede communication must be considered in order to avoid miscommunication during this important learning event.

The literature on oral communication between and among groups belonging to different cultures shows that miscommunication occurs frequently because of participants' differences in styles of speech, modes of delivery, and expectations in the communication event (Folman and Sarig, 1989). This issue of potential miscommunication between or among individuals who belong to different cultures becomes central for our discussion of feedback in L2 writing, since L2 writing instructors communicate with students who come from different cultural and social backgrounds and use English as a L2 or as a foreign language to communicate their concerns, issues, and points of view in writing conferences,

with the possibility of miscommunication with the L2 instructor due to pragmatic differences in the use of English (Purves and Purves, 1986, Soter, 1988).

Pragmatic competence is a crucial factor in lowering miscommunication during writing conferences since both the instructor and L2 writer are able to negotiate the meaning of central issues in the writing processes in L2. Ellis (1999, p. 187) contends that “learners do not usually participate in communicative events as equals—at least when their interlocutors are native speakers.” This is central to our discussion of writing conferences in which L2 writers are constantly negotiating meaning not on the same level with the instructor, but in a situation in which the instructor is, implicitly or explicitly, the leading voice in the analysis of the writing processes developed by L2 writers.

Patthey-Chavez and Ferris (1997) conducted research on writing conferences and the weaving of multiple voices in college composition. These scholars found that even though writing conferences present the same format and procedure for all the students, the support that each student receives varies according to the intrinsic nature of L2 writers and their sociocultural characteristics. As Patthey-Chavez and Ferris (1999) write,

...Previous research on teacher-student writing conferences has had two important limitations: ( 1) Researchers have rarely linked their analyses of the conferences to subsequent student writing in any systematic way, making it difficult to evaluate the effects of the conferences; (2) researchers have often not considered adequately either the larger contexts in which students were operating, including institutional expectations of both students and teachers, or individual differences in ability, language, or culture among students (p.51).

Therefore, a writing conference is not a communication event that occurs in isolation but is embedded in a complex system that includes cultural, social, linguistic, and individual factors in the instructor, L2 writer, and the environment in which the writing conference takes place.

Patthey-Chavez and Ferris (1999) refer to this specific area of writing conferences as “Conferencing as a Zone of Proximal Development” since this particular approach to writing conferences is based on the classic example of teacher and student ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). In this approach to writing conferences, “An expert meets with a novice to address a given task; the expert assists the novice in performing the task, guiding the novice toward performing the task independently” (p. 52). In other words, in approaching the writing conference from a Vygostkyan perspective, the instructor and L2 writer have the opportunity to acquire and use the knowledge necessary to address writing in a second language through clear, specific, and context-oriented communication that takes into account the sociocultural factors of both interlocutors.

Lensmire (1994) looks at the writing conference as a language socialization activity in which the L2 instructor and L2 writer construct, maintain, and develop communication to discuss pivotal points in writing in a second language. Lensmire (1994) also argues that writing conferences can be seen as a way of socializing L2 writers into academic communities with their specific cultures, discourses, and communicative conventions, which play a crucial role in writing development in a second language in institutions of higher education in the United States.

Strauss and Xiang (2006) point out that the writing conference in L2 can be perceived as a place in which L2 writers can find the necessary support to overcome writing blocks in a second language and be successful writers in different content areas. Strauss and Xiang (2006) name this opportunity a locus of emergent agency, in which agency is seen as an opportunity for L2 writers to exercise their power to discuss their writing needs and goals in college writing. In this case, the writing conference is not a linear process of communication, in which cultural, social, and individual factors are neither neutral nor absent, but is a place in which these factors play an important and dynamic role in the development of second language writing in ELL students.

Powers (1993) recognizes the importance of rethinking conferencing for ESL writers by supporting not only their cultural needs but also, and more importantly, their academic needs in institutions of higher education in the United States. Powers (1993) discusses the importance of not taking for granted that L2 writers are able to understand the conventions of English writing just because they are attending an institution of higher education in the United States and apparently are in the position of communicating more or less effectively with L2 writing instructors. This author suggests that an important strategy is to adapt conferences to the individual needs of L2 writers in order to avoid the dangers of overgeneralization and stereotyping of L2 writers in writing courses.

Williams (1995) focuses her attention on models of response for L2 writers, strongly emphasizing that we do not yet have a single best way to respond to student writing. Williams (1995) argues that different teachers have different styles and strategies to respond to student writing during writing conferences and can rethink and readapt their strategies according to the L2 writers in their classrooms. Williams (1995) contends that writing

conferences present a high degree of variation even though the basic dyadic structure does not change. In other words, the writing conference becomes a fluid and ever changing practice where L2 writers and instructors play an important role in the form and content of the conference.

Thonus (1993) noticed that during writing conferences, L2 writers and instructors activate interactional modifications that are important to continually negotiating meaning related to important parts of the writing process. Thonus (1993) contends that making interactional modifications for L2 writers is paramount, so that these writers have more substantial feedback from L2 writing instructors and, more importantly, can appropriate and transform what was discussed in the session and use this new knowledge in their writing process in a second language. This process of transformation is what L2 writers expect from writing conferences in which they receive not only feedback on the surface structure of their texts but crucial information on the cultural, social, linguistic, and pragmatic conventions of writing in a second language (Harklau, Losey, and Siegal, 1999, Harris, 1997).

Research indicates that if writing conferences are well-planned and contextualized, they can give L2 writers the opportunity not only to clarify difficult points in the writing process, but, more importantly, have the opportunity to acquire a new and more comprehensive perspective on writing in a second language by acquiring specific knowledge about what writing does in academic settings (Landolfi, 1988, Poole, 1992, 1994, Poole and Patthey-Chavez, 1994, Radecki and Swales, 1988).

Ewert (2009) sees L2 writing conferences as an important feature in teaching academic writing because they support L2 writers within a sociocultural framework. In



particular, Ewert (2009) suggests that the use of the writing conference in L2 writing presents the advantage of supporting the second language writer in acquiring in-depth understanding of rhetorical models, creating a sense of audience, and receiving feedback. As Ewert (2009) also points out, the L2 writing conference gives the instructor the opportunity to better scaffold the second language writer, because the instructor can focus on the L2 writer's specific needs by using specific feedback instruction during the conference.

As Ewert (2009) claims, "There are a limited number of studies that analyze the talk of teachers in face-to-face classroom writing conferences with adult L2 learners." (p.253) Ewert (2009) cites Goldstein and Conrad's (1990) study as the first attempt to understand how L2 conferences can support the acquisition of academic writing in second language learners. Ewert (2009) maintains, however, that more studies need to be designed and carried out in order to unpack the complex nature of L2 writing conferences so that we can understand how such a format for feedback can support L2 writers in their acquisition of academic writing in a second language.

Heneda (2000, 2004) investigated the nature of teacher-learner writing conference discourse by looking at the revisions of students in her Japanese foreign language classroom, using activity theory, systematic functional linguistics, and situated literacy. Heneda (2000, 2004) found that learner participation was influenced by L2 proficiency since advanced learners demonstrated a higher level of participation in the conferences, using more sophisticated rhetorical choices in interacting with the instructor, while intermediate students used more basic language during the conferences.

Heneda (2000, 2004) claims that such a difference between L2 writers during the conferences needs further investigation. According to Heneda (2000, 2004), we need to gain a better understanding of the relationship between teacher talk and learner participation in writing conferences and the potential of the effects that such a relationship has on text revision.

Ewert (2009) points out that another issue related to writing conferences needs further investigation, that of the frameworks of negotiation and scaffolding during writing conferences. Ewert (2009) maintains that former studies carried out on writing conferences (Goldstein and Conrad, 1990; Patthey-Chavez and Ferris, 1997) indicated that it was the more proficient learners who showed a higher level of interaction and longer exchanges with the teacher. As Ewert (2009) writes, “It is not surprising that the relationship of the talk to the revisions was positive for stronger students, but it is not clear what aspects of the talk made the difference.” (p.254)

Ewert (2009) suggests that the talk of less proficient second language learners needs to be investigated in order to see why these learners are not more interactive through questioning than more proficient L2 learners. Ewert (2009) also invites researchers in L2 writing to focus their attention on the “differences of talk with different types of learners, different writing tasks, and different conference foci...to understand how the frameworks of negotiation and scaffolding interface in the analysis of conference talks.” (p.254)

### **Genre and L2 Writing**

**Genre as discursive practice.** According to Bhatia (2004), the investigation of genre as discursive practice need to focus on how discourses are formed in the different disciplines

and how these discourses affect the formation, consolidation, and institutionalization of knowledge. One way to concretely analyze genre as discursive practice is by looking at its textual organization and attempting to identify patterns of discourse organization that represent landmarks in disciplinary discourses (Bhatia, 2004).

Hyland (2007) points out that one important analytical feature for investigating genre as discursive practice is by looking at rhetorical patterns. For Hyland (2007), genre is not just a container for writing, by following a recipe. Hyland (2007) sees genre as a very productive way of engaging with writing in any context. Hyland (2007) suggests that genres can show the writer a way in which to engage with the text, a starting point from which the writer can dialogue with the text and write for meaning.

According to Bhatia (1999c) and Hyland (2000), discourses tend to become extremely contextualized in the discourse community in which they are produced and maintained. According to Bhatia (1999c) and Hyland (2000), genres are social linguistic events that are very important not only to the members of the community that produces and maintains that discourse, but to other potential external participants who want to become part of that discourse community or parlor in order to have access to what is considered important knowledge in a discipline or field of study.

Burke (1973) addresses the discursive formation in social and cultural contexts by proposing the metaphor of the parlor, writing,

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion has already

began long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor and argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance... The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress (110-111).

What Burke (1973) suggests here is that a discourse is never a pure and crystallized linguistic form, but, rather, a vibrant, dynamic and powerful communicative and ideological structure that is formed and constantly shaped and reshaped by the members that form the discourse community by entering the discourses along chronological and sociocultural lines. In other words, the metaphor of the parlor represents the dynamic and powerful force that discourses have in our social, cultural, and educational worlds as well as the influence that they have on our knowledge and perception of experience.

Many of the points discussed above, in particular the idea of the parlor and the importance of discourse communities, have importance in the inquiry into a better and more comprehensive discussion of language use that incorporates analysis of the context in which a discourse takes place, forms, and becomes the landmark of a particular discourse community (Bhatia, 2004). Bhatia (2004) suggests that genre analysis must be the basis for a specific, clear, and systematic investigation of the language that constitutes the discursive practices of a particular discourse community. This is due to the analytic procedures of genre analysis, in which scholars develop a fine description of language in different settings

ranging from educational to professional. In other words, genre analysis is more than a simple description of language structures since it focuses on specific uses of language by the community under investigation by looking at the formation of the institutional and conventional uses of the language in that community (Bhatia, 2004).

According to Miller (1984), genre analysis is the study of specific linguistic behaviors in institutionalized academic or professional settings. Miller (1984), Bazerman (1994), and Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) refer to genre analysis as the study of typifications of rhetorical action that present regularities for social-oriented communication. What this means is that any discourse community possesses a repertoire of sociocultural and linguistic devices that allows it to communicate with members and non-members of that community with the goal of socially spreading its knowledge and becoming visible among other discourse communities in a specific social and cultural setting.

Bhatia (2004) offers an important summary of what genre analysis is and what it does for scholars committed to the study of the social regularities of language. Bhatia (2004, p. 23) presents six important points, as follows: (a) genres are recognizable communicative events, characterized by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which they regularly occur; (b) genres are highly structured and conventionalized constructs, with constraints on allowable contributions, not only in terms of the intentions one would like to give expression to and the shape that they often take, but in terms of the lexico-grammatical resources one can employ to give discursal values to such formal structures; (c) established members of a particular professional community will have a much greater knowledge and understanding of the use

and exploitation of genres than those who are apprentices, new members or outsiders; (d) although genres are viewed as conventionalized constructs, expert members of disciplinary and professional communities often exploit generic resources to express not only private but also organizational intentions within the constructs of socially recognized communicative purposes; (e) genres are reflections of disciplinary and organizational cultures, and in that sense, focus on social actions embedded within disciplinary, professional and other institutional practices; (f) all disciplinary and professional genres have integrity of their own, which is often identified with reference to a combination of textual, discursive and contextual factors.

It is important to point out that one common and important feature that different genres share is the conventionalized use of language that gives form and content to the discursive practices of academic and professional communities. Even though genres present ample variations among them, they always present what can be defined as a highly conventional use of linguistic and rhetorical structures manipulated by the discourse community to give form and content to their communicative intentions. As Huckin (1995) writes, “Genres are inherently dynamic rhetorical structures that can be manipulated according to conditions of use, and that genre knowledge is therefore best conceptualized as a form of situated cognition in disciplinary cultures.” (p.6)

A different view of genres, as conventionalized and rigid linguistic and rhetorical structures, is offered by Swales (1990) and Hasan (1985). According to Swales (1990) and Hasan (1985), genres evolve through time due to the site of contention and contributions of its members who continuously shape and reshape genres within the boundaries of their

discourse communities. Considering the analyses of Swales (1990) and Hasan (1985), we can summarize their position as follows: (a) genres, even though they present recognizable features, continually change and develop; (b) members of academic and professional communities use genres in new and often creative ways; (c) genres are never pure and crystallized forms, but are often hybrid products of a long and complex sociolinguistic and sociocultural process; (d) genres are used by the members of academic and professional communities by applying a continuous process of interpretation and contextualization; (e) genres must be investigated by following an interdisciplinary perspective that takes into account not only the linguistic features of the genres under analysis, but also cultural, social, historical, and ideological conditions.

**Genres systems.** To this point, the discussion on genres has focused on theories of what genre is and does in different cultural, social, academic and professional contexts. We have seen how genres work as analytic tools to show how texts produce and disseminate knowledge in the various academic and professional communities in which they are produced and used. As Bazerman and Prior (2004) write,

...what we say or write, what we intend to accomplish by what we say or write, and what people understand us to be attempting points out how much our intentions may be misunderstood and just how difficult may be coordinating our actions with each other...we can anticipate better what their [people] reactions will be if we follow...standardized, recognizable forms. These patterns are mutually reinforcing. Recognizable, self-reinforcing forms of communication emerge as genres (pp. 315-316).

Discourse communities create patterns of written and oral discourses that use language in recognizable patterns to be able to communicate knowledge effectively. What is important to point out here is that genres are not isolated forms of communication in discourse communities, but represent systematic and dynamic ways of communication that are created and used by these communities for a variety of purposes (Bruffee, 1986).

Bazerman and Prior (2004) refer to this systematic set of forms of written and oral communication as a genre system. Bazerman and Prior (2004) write

A Genre System is comprised of the several genre sets of people working together in an organized way, plus the patterned relations in the production, flow, and use of these documents. A genre system captures the regular sequences of how genre follows on another in the typical communication flows of a group of people (p. 318).

A genre system can be represented by a teacher writing a syllabus, assignment sheets, personal notes on readings, notes on given lectures, and the like (Bazerman and Prior, 2004). This means that any individual who belongs to a specific discourse community never writes by relying on an isolated genre but rather, will most likely employ different genres that are representative of his/her academic environment or professional organization. In other words, genre systems are the visible and concrete representation of how knowledge is systematically organized and exploited by different academic and professional organizations in their attempt to communicate knowledge effectively by reducing any potential misunderstanding.

Feez (2002) points out that genres in academic writing contexts help learners understand how to cope with the requirements of the discourse community in which the writing takes place and helps us become aware of and understand how genre systems are



paramount to the institutionalization of discursive practices for the recognition of social authorship and power status in academic and professional organizations. Feez (2002) points out that generic writing supports the development of better writing in context. As Feez (2002) claims, generic writing helps L2 writers construct meaning through a better understanding of how writing conventions work in a specific field of study or discipline.

Genres systems represent the consensus that a discourse community reaches on how cultures must be shared and communicated among its members and in the outside world (Bhatia, 2004). A genre system is also representative of what a discourse community values in the social construction of knowledge. As Myers (1995) writes,

Disciplines [discourse communities] are like cultures in that their members have shared, taken for granted beliefs; these beliefs can be mutually incomprehensible between cultures; these beliefs are encoded in a language; they are embodied in practices; new members are brought into culture through rituals (p. 5).

Any discourse community, therefore, must possess a genre system that allows it not only to socially and culturally construct knowledge but also to communicate and share this knowledge among its members and others who are willing to join the community to share and enrich such knowledge. As Fowler (1982) comments,

...genres are a positive support. They offer room, as one might say, for him to write in-a habitation of mediated definiteness; a proportioned mental space; a literary matrix by which to order his experience during composition. ...The writer is invited to match experience and form in a specific yet undetermined way. Accepting the

invitation does not solve his problem of expression but it gives him access to formal ideas as to how a variety of constituents might suitably be combined (p. 31).

Genres are important places where the writer or a professional or academic community is able to lay out the foundations for the creation and sharing of knowledge. As Ryan (1981) writes, “The significance of generic process resides in their cognitive and cultural value, and the purpose of genre theory is to lay out the implicit knowledge of the users of genres” (p. 112). Genres hold an important place in written communication in disciplinary cultures “to facilitate the social interactions that are instrumental in the production of knowledge” (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995, p. 475).

What is important to point out in the present analysis is that genres in disciplinary and professional communities are local. The adjective local used here has an important connotation as summarized by Geertz (1983), as follows: “The shapes of knowledge are ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and their encasements” (p. 4). Academic and professional communities produce knowledge at a local level due to the social and cultural limits that play a crucial role in the ways in which genres are used for the production of knowledge. Therefore, genres represent the media through which academic and professional communities communicate their knowledge and the ways in which knowledge must be received and understood (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995).

Bakhtin (1981) made an important contribution to a systematic view of genres. According to Bakhtin (1981), genres are places where the official language of an academic or professional community is not set in stone but where different voices contribute to a

continuous reshaping of language and modes of communication. As Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) write,

Knowledge production is carried out and codified largely through generic forms of writing: lab reports, working papers, reviews, grant proposals, technical reports, conference papers, journal articles, monographs, and so forth. Genres are the media through which scholars and scientists communicate with their peers. Because genres are intimately linked to a discipline's methodology, they package information in ways that conform to a discipline's norms, values, and ideology. Understanding the genres of written communication in one's field is therefore essential to professional success (p. 476).

A key aspect of Berkenkotter and Huckin's (1995) view of genres is that without entering into a generic system, it is not possible for an individual to become part of the production and sharing of knowledge that belongs to a professional or academic community. The idea of genres as places of shared discursive practices is central to the idea of the role of genre as the locus where knowledge is produced and shared by members of a professional or academic community through the use of a common language and accepted communication practices. Bakhtin (1981) also points out the exclusive nature of genres as follows:

For the speakers of the language themselves, these generic languages and professional jargons are directly intentional—they denote and express directly and fully, and are capable of expressing themselves without mediation; but outside, that is, for those not participating in the given purview, these languages may be treated as objects, as

typifications, as local color. For such outsiders these languages become things, limited in their meaning and expression (p. 289).

What is needed then is an in-depth analysis of the voices, languages, and modes of communication that insiders share within the boundaries of the genres systems they use and share for the production of knowledge. Such inquiry can provide us with very rich data and in-depth understanding of how generic forms of written and oral communication are systematically used by academic and professional communities.

One question that emerges in the present discussion on the systematic study of genres is the following: “From where should we begin to investigate its form and content? What elements do we need to take into account to develop a thorough analysis of genres?” An important point of departure is to look at genres as rhetorical structures that are socially and culturally relevant for any form of written and oral communication (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995).

As Miller (1992) contends,

To consider as potential genres such homely discourse as the letter of recommendation, the user manual, the progress report, the ransom note, the lecture, and the white paper, as well as the eulogy, the apologia, the inaugural, the public proceeding, and the sermon, is not to trivialize the study of genres; it is to take seriously the rhetoric in which we are immersed and the situations in which we find ourselves (p. 155).

Miller (1992) asserts that discursive and communicative practices make an academic and professional community unique in the way in which it produces and communicates knowledge. In turn, genres are complex rhetorical systems that allow academic and professional communities to develop discursive practices inherent to their own purposes.

Hyland (2004) points out that genre is a central concept in second language writing and argues that genres are recursive rhetorical structures that enable the members of an academic and professional community to exchange information and knowledge by relying upon known and accepted modes of communication. According to Hyland (2004), genres facilitate and support L2 writers in their efforts to understand the generic conventions of an academic field and become part of that discourse community. L2 writers, as members of an academic or professional community, acquire the capability to use these highly specialized rhetorical structures. Hyland (2004) points out that genres used in second language writing are practical and conceptual tools that help second language writers structure their writing for various contexts. Hyland (2007) points out that genre pedagogy is central to L2 writing instruction. As Hyland (2007) claims, “Genre-based pedagogies offer a valuable resource for assisting both pre- and in-service writing instructors to assist their students to produce effective and relevant texts.” (p.148) Hyland (2007) also suggests that genres in L2 instruction give coherency to the teaching of second language writing since:

Instead of focusing on the process of composition, the content of texts, or the abstract prescriptions of disembodied grammars, genres pedagogies enable teachers to ground their courses in the texts that students will have to write in their target contexts,

thereby supporting learners to participate effectively in the world outside the ESL classroom (p.148).

The view that genres are not merely formulas to be learned but complex linguistic and cultural systems of discourse and communication opens up a new line of discussion important in our analysis of how genres affect communication in academic and professional communities. As Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), following Brown et al., (1989, p. 33), argue

...Genre knowledge is a form of situated cognition, that is, knowledge that is indexical, “inextricably a product of the activity and situations in which it [is] produced” (Brown et al., 1989, p.33). Learning the genres of academic discourse, like other forms of concept learning, evolves “with each new occasion of use because new situations, negotiations, and activities inevitably recast it in a new way, more densely textured form” (Brown et al., 1989, p. 33)

Therefore, genres as cognitive rhetorical structures place themselves at the center of any communicative activity that academic and professional communities produce and change over time. The change that occurs, however, does not happen only in genre forms, but more importantly, in genre content, since every change in form affects the content, and vice versa, due to the interrelatedness of form and content in generic forms (Hyland, 2007). In turn, genres as pedagogical tools give instructors the opportunity to play a central role in addressing the writing needs of second language writers in academic contexts.

Hyland (2004) points out that genre is one of the pivotal points of second language writing since a generic teaching in L2 writing can help L2 writers become proficient

academic writers by helping them understand and apply the writing conventions of a specific discipline. Moreover, Hyland (2004) suggests that genre is also important to understanding discursive academic conventions within sociocultural contexts. What Hyland (2004) points out is that genre writing is the key that opens up the sociocultural ground where discursive practices are created, maintained, and refined over time.

Hyland (2003) claims that genre-based pedagogy in L2 writing supports second language writers in their efforts to learn writing in a second language that consists of “purposeful, socially situated responses to particular contexts and communities.” (p.17) Hyland (2003) also suggests that genres are “a non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning.” (p.18) Hyland’s (2003) proposed paradigm views writing as a process in which the instructor supports the second language writer as a facilitator, “assisting writers to express their own meanings through an encouraging and co-operative environment with minimal interference.” (p.18)

Marshall and Barritt (1990) contend that genre knowledge is gained when content is mastered over form. What this means is that genre knowledge, according to Marshall and Barritt (1990), goes beyond the mere acquisition of structural elements of genres and implies that the individual must delve into the complex organization of content in order to use genre appropriately.

According to Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995 genre content is defined as “background knowledge, that is, knowledge (of the world, of a particular community, of a discipline, etc.) that readers of that genre assumed to have” (p. 489). In any disciplinary or professional

community, certain knowledge of the world as well as the way in which the community perceives the world are embedded in its organization of knowledge through content that is institutionalized, accepted, and shared among its members.

As Hyland (2003) maintains, genre “seeks to understand the ways individuals use language to orient and interpret particular communicative situations.” (p.22) Hyland (2003) sees genre in second language writing as important in helping develop second language writers’ ability to dialogue with the knowledge of the discipline by orienting their writing accordingly. Genre writing involves “drawing on the texts we typically encounter and are familiar with.” (Hyland, 2003 p.23) In turn, genre in second language writing allows second language writers to learn how to communicate in their discourse communities by acquiring the discourse competence to use written texts for such a purpose (Thompson, 2001). As Giddens (1984) writes,

The knowledge of social conventions, of oneself and other human beings, presumed in being able to “go on” in the diversity of contexts of social life is detailed and dazzling. All competent members of society are vastly skilled in the practical accomplishments of sociology and are expert “sociologists.” The knowledge they possess is not incidental to the persistent patterning of social life but is integral to it (p. 26).

Genres are social, linguistic, and cultural structures that enable individuals to make sense of the world, become an integral part of the communities in which they live, and interact with the world by using language to create meaning. Genres are the places where experience takes form and content, becoming becomes intelligible to the members of a



community and enabling them to have an identity and a place in the sociocultural environment in which they live and operate.

To conclude this discussion of genres, we need to reflect upon the dynamic and ever-changing nature of genres. What this means is that genres will always evolve and will pose puzzling questions to scholars inquiring into their importance in a knowledge-based society where individuals need complex systems in order to understand and use knowledge accordingly. Genre knowledge is always found at the intersection of content and form in sociocultural contexts (Hyland, 2006). Genres are living systems that are created and create conditions and opportunities for communication of a particular worldview, of a particular way of constructing and sharing the knowledge of an academic or professional community, and of norms of acceptance and refusals of what is considered acceptable or not in a community of scholars or professionals.

Genres are the core from which knowledge is systematically organized and used by the members of an academic or professional community; they are a very highly specialized form of social and cultural communication in which linguistic signs acquire a very specialized meaning in order to give form and content to the knowledge that a community creates and shares among its members (Hodge and Kress, 1988). Genres are complex linguistic and semiotic systems that continuously transform language in order to adapt it to accommodate new knowledge and new ways to communicate knowledge, and to allow individuals to use discursive practices in their academic or professional communities effectively.

**Instruction in academic writing as L2.** Elton (2010) argues that academic writing as a high specialized genre of writing cannot be easily taught since it varies from one discipline to another. According to Elton (2010), the defining features of academic writing from rhetorical structures to lexicon must be explicitly taught in specific courses related to the disciplines in which academic writing is used. Elton (2010) suggests that one method among the others to address the rhetorical and lexical components of academic writing within disciplinary contexts is to create “a collaboration between disciplinary specialists, writing specialists and students, and to discuss their appropriate roles in improving the skills of students’ ability to engage in academic writing in a discipline” (p.152). In so doing, academic writing in a second language becomes more a sociocultural endeavor where students and experts in the field can address the specific needs of academic writing in content-specific disciplines.

Bruce (2008) maintains that the teaching of academic writing has become of primary importance in the last decade. According to Bruce (2008) English as an international language and academic English in particular “gave rise to exponential growth in the activities of language teaching, materials publishing, and research that further informs these activities.” (p. 1) Bruce (2008) poses the question of how to address this exponential growth in academic writing in English and how to develop curriculum and courses that can meet the needs of the many second language writers that attend colleges and universities in the United States.

Bruce (2008) suggests that one approach among the others is to teach academic writing by looking at the genres used in the academia. Bruce (2008) writes

Given the centrality of the development of a discourse competence to the aims of academic writing courses, it is evident that the object of teaching and learning in such

courses will be extended units of written discourse. Teachers, therefore, need to develop ways of systematically classifying and deconstructing such large language entities. In relation to this need, genre-based approaches to language teaching (and particularly the teaching of writing) continue to attract considerable interest from language teachers who are looking for frameworks around which they can organize their courses in order to promote the development of the discourse competence of their learners (p. 1).

What Bruce (2008) suggests is a reorganization of the teaching of academic writing by looking at the needs of the specific disciplinary discourses and what teachers need to address teach by using a writing pedagogy based on genre. Moreover, Bruce (2008) points out the importance to deconstruct the units of written discourses in ways that can become manageable for instructors and students in university courses and give writers the ability to master academic writing effectively in different discourse communities in the academia.

Macbeth (2010) in her study on the use and usefulness of models in academic writing for second language learners in higher education courses found that models offered students something they could rely upon when they had to understand how to write an essay in English. Macbeth (2010) contends that models need to be used by instructor with a cautionary note since “They forfeit some things in order to make others vivid, and it is to this astray that they then had their pedagogical value.” (p. 33). Macbeth (2010) concludes that the use of models or genres in teaching academic writing to second language learners “do offer the promise that if one follows one of them an ideal outcome will result.” (p.45)

Leki (1995) in a former of University-level English language learners found as Macbeth (2010) that models were widely used by English language learners in their attempt to conform to the requirements of academic writing. Leki (1995) found that English language learners were following models of good academic writing with the goal to avoid mistakes in their assignments and learn from an established way of writing in English academically. Also, by comparing Leki (1995) and Macbeth (2010) it can be suggested that models or genres represent very clear guide lines for second language writers and can lower the challenges to write in a second language academically by showing L2 writers' specific directions to follow in the process of writing in English in academic contexts.

Cimasko, Reichelt, Im, and Arik (2009) point out the state of research in second language writing and the instructional concerns that second language writing faces by pointing out the limits of such a research. According to Cimasko et al. (2009) one challenge that the field of second language writing in facing today is that the majority of the studies come from the North American region and address issues that deal primarily with instruction in North American Universities and less with writing academically in other languages. What Cimasko et al. (2009) contend is that if we want to understand how to support international students in their efforts to become proficient writers in English we should understand more what challenges and issues they face in their L1. This is due to the fact that by becoming aware of what writing instruction means in another language and what pedagogical needs second language writers have in their L1, we can try to develop curriculum and instruction that help students see the importance of writing in a second language.

Cimasko et al. (2009) express pedagogical concerns in relation to the approach instructors should use in teaching academic writing to second language learners. The scholars do suggest that further studies in second language writing pedagogy should investigate different practices that can help second language writers and instructor develop effective instruction in writing academically in English. Cimasko et al. (2009) conclude that multiple avenues and strategies for teaching second language writing must be addressed by designing studies that will guide practice through data and research.

Recent research on second language writing in academic contexts has been carried out by Storch (2009). Storch's (2009) findings suggest that second language writers in university courses improved their academic writing skills due to the support of the instructor in terms of structure and ability to express ideas within academic writing requirements. As Storch (2009) reports in her study, instruction in academic writing for ESL students were primarily from the inability to improve linguistic accuracy and ability to express more complex ideas on paper. Furthermore, Storch (2009) findings suggest that another concern for second language writers in her study was to quote sources correctly and copy verbatim from sources without any further elaboration.

Storch (2009) claims that such instructional issues encountered by international students writing academically in English was due to "The short duration of the study (one semester) as well as perhaps the absence of feedback" (p.103) In turn, Storch (2009) findings are not conclusive in terms of what strategies can be used to support ESL student in their efforts to improve their academic writing in English since the scholar points out the limitations of the study in terms of its short duration, one semester.

Another important area of second language writing research is focused on the ability of second language writers to acquire lexical phrases in academic writing with the goal to become part of a specific discourse community (Li and Schmitt, 2009). Li and Schmitt (2009) studied the use of lexical phrases in second language writers in a longitudinal study by collecting a number of MA assignments and interviews focusing on these assignments. Li and Schmitt (2009) found that the participants in the study improved on the use of lexical phrases but tended to “Rely too heavily on a limited range of phrases” (p. 85). Also, Li and Schmitt (2009) found that the participants in the study had the tendency to learn the formulaic language of academic conventions but had difficulty applying it to different contexts of use.

Li and Schmitt (2009) suggest that their longitudinal study demonstrated that the one of the problems of second language writers is to go beyond the imitation of some models they rely upon at the beginning of their writing process in a second language. Li and Schmitt (2009) point out those models should be always used with caution and that later on second language writers should be supported in their efforts to go beyond formulaic academic writing and use it at a more sophisticated level. In turn, models of academic writing are the starting point from which academic writing in a second language takes place but should not be considered the only approach to the teaching of academic writing in a second language.

Lei (2009) investigated academic writing in L2 learners using an activity theory framework by looking at two Chinese students writing in English. Lei (2009) findings indicate that the participants in the study were able to use academic writing in English by the use of specific strategies such as scaffolding from the instructor, constant feedback, and the

ability to connect writing with the context and goals in which it was used. Lei (2008) suggest that a sociocultural approach to writing to investigate strategies in second language writing is needed. The scholar argues that “Vygotsky’s idea of mediation is a key to this approach. According to Vygotsky, humans are not restricted to simple stimulus-response reflexes; they are able to make indirect connections between incoming stimulation and their responses through various links (Luria, 1976).” (p. 213) Lei (2009) points out that such mediation is accomplished by technical or psychological tools such as language. Lei’s findings suggest that second language writers were using specific sociocultural strategies to learn and use academic writing in English. Lei (2009) summarizes these strategies as artifact-mediated strategies were the two participants used different artifacts to mediate writing such as the Internet, dictionaries, English literary works and textbooks.

Lei (2009) conclude that the combination of these strategies applied to academic writing in a second language allowed the participants to adapt their writing to the different situations in which writing was required. Moreover, Lei’s (2009) study demonstrates that the application of meditation in the use of academic writing in a second language can help L2 writers to improve their writing academically in English by giving them practical and cognitive tools they can use during the writing process.

Academic writing instruction in a second language was investigated by Roberts and Cimasko (2008) in a study of responses to second language writing from university professor. Roberts and Cimasko (2008) investigated the responses of social science and engineering science faculty to the samples written by second language writers. Roberts and Cimasko (2008) suggest in their findings that one of the issues that emerged in this study was

the response of the social science and engineering faculty to evaluate second language writing samples more on the content and meaning and less on the grammar.

The study of Roberts and Cimasko (2008) suggests that pedagogical concerns to second language writing do not always focus on grammar but also many professors look at the accuracy and the order of ideas in the text and the ability of the second language writers to use academic writing in English according to the social and cultural conventions of the disciplines. This indicates that academic writing in L2 ranges from issues of correctness of language and rhetorical structures to social and cultural conventions specific to the different academic disciplines. As Hyland (2004) points out, academic writing as a system entails the formal structures of language and the rhetoric and the social and cultural affiliations in which academic writing takes place. Second language writers must become familiar with both dimensions of academic writing if they want to become part of the knowledge of their disciplines.

**Challenges in L2 writing.** Challenges to the teaching of writing in a second language have been investigated extensively. The studies discussed in this part of the literature review analyze the issues of challenges in teaching writing in a second language from different perspectives. My discussion focuses on recent literature that discusses such challenges in details and suggests possible interventions to help L2 writers become successful in college courses.

Song (2006) investigated the challenges ESL students had in college courses by analyzing the responses of the instructors and the students on the failure of the ESL students in their college courses. Song (2006) found that many of the reasons for ESL students failing



college courses were factors that take into account lack of interest, insufficient knowledge of the target language, and deficient first reading-writing language skills. Song (2006) points out that one possible intervention to face such challenges is to have a more pro-active faculty that can support ESL writers in college courses by setting up more individual conferences with the students, discuss in more details the issues that ESL writers face in their writing assignments, and understand students' needs and problems more in details.

An important finding from Song (2006) study is that ESL students were asking more conferences with the instructor since they considered such a support crucial for their academic success. Song (2006) points out in his study that the ESL students wanted their instructor to be more sensitive to their problems to writing in a second language by understanding how difficult were to write and express their thoughts in English.

Schwarzer (2009) looks at the challenges that ESL writers must face to become proficient writers. Schwarzer (2009) suggests that what it is important for supporting ESL writers in their efforts to become proficient second language writer lies in the ability of the instructor to motivate the second language writers to use writing in the target language in meaningful contexts. The scholar suggests providing second language writers with authentic learning. Schwarzer (2009) defines authentic learning as “Means to incorporate learning material and learning experiences from the learners' daily lives. Use of classroom activities that the learner could use tomorrow or the next day in real life” (p.29)

Schwarzer (2009) also claims that ESL writers should be exposed to inquiry-based lessons that make the ESL learners part of the learning and writing process by developing their analytical and thinking skills. As Schwarzer (2009) maintains ESL learners must

become active participants in the curriculum since being an active participant in the curriculum process support ESL students in their reading and writing efforts. Schwarzer (2009) suggests a strategy that ESL students can use when reading or writing a text: questioning. The scholar claims that by interacting with any reading and writing material through questioning ESL learners can develop the ability to read and write for meaning in the target language. In turn, Schwarzer (2009) article presents practical suggestions for teacher and ESL learners to use in the process of becoming proficient readers and writers in a second language.

A different approach to the study of challenges in second language writers is proposed by Fernsten (2009). Fernsten (2009) proposes a critical approach to second language writing that can allow L2 writers to understand who they are as writers in the target language. By using ethnographic research design Fernsten (2009) investigated how second language writers unfold their identity in a second language and become proficient writers through time. The findings of Fernsten (2009) study suggests that identity and writing proficiency in L2 is not static but continuously changes due to the second language writer development of more analytical and critical skills in the L2. The author writes that students should become more inquisitive on the demands of academic writing in their discipline and establish a critical relationship with their instructor. This critical relationship, according to Fernsten (2009), must be based on asking very focused and specific questions to the instructors, to make sure that the second language writer understands the nature and goal of the writing assignments and the format and content of what to write. In other words, critical and analytical thinking applied to specific content knowledge.

Hu (2007) developed an EAP writing course for Chinese students to help them be ready to face the challenges to write academic English in college courses. Hu (2009) developed the curriculum by taking into account the following components: (1) the curricular objectives that the writing course aims to accomplish; (2) the pedagogy that is adopted in the course; (3) the course materials that are used; (4) the ways in which the students' progress in academic writing is assessed; and (5) the gains in writing proficiency that the students have experienced, as well as the feedback that they have given on the course.

Hu (2009) in her findings reports that the curriculum designed for the Chinese students for the EAP course contributed to the development of EAP curriculum that better cater for the academic writing needs of second language students in institutions of higher education (p. 67). Moreover, as Hu (2009) claims such a curriculum helped Chinese students acquire a level of competence and confidence that “will enable them to handle university-level writing tasks successfully.” (p. 83) Also, Hu (2009) points out four areas of improvements to support second language writers to become proficient writers in L2: (a) assessment to understand not only the current level of second language writers but also further interventions needed; (b) use of computer technology to support second language writers in being exposed to more writing outside the classroom in new writing spaces via internet; (c) help students publish in the target language, English, as a means to help them understand the discursive requirements of their disciplines and become part of these discourses; (d) longitudinal post-course evaluation to gauge the development of writing skills in second language writers.

Ha (2006) explored the ability of second language writers to use their previous knowledge to write in a second language. Ha (2006) investigated the writing awareness of 36 Chinese students writing in English in a three-month university course. Ha (2006) asked the participants in the study to write reflective journals to demonstrate their awareness of writing in English as a second language. Also, the participants in the study wrote formal essays in English as part of their course requirements.

Ha (2006) claims that such a challenge to be able to self-reflect in a different language was successfully overcome by the ESL writers. Ha's (2006) study demonstrates that if ESL writers receive adequate support during their writing processes in a second language they will show significant improvement and will be ready to take the challenge to write in a second language.

Shin (2006) addresses the needs to look at the challenges second language writers have to write in English as a second language by supporting the development of L2 writers' reflective thinking and writing through journal writing and tutorials at the university levels. Shin (2006) findings indicate that the use of tutorials and journal writing for second language writers supported students' writing in English as second language by helping ESL writers become more familiar with their thinking and writing processes. Shin (2006) suggests that ESL teachers who focus their instruction on writing in L2 should encourage second language writers to face the challenge of writing in English by developing their cognitive skills, reflective thinking and writing in the target language to refine their ability to use the rhetorical and lexical structures of academic writing at a higher level of thinking and reflection.

Steinman (2007) suggests what Shin (2006) found in her study on tutorials and the use of reflective thinking in academic writing in L2. Steinman (2007) used student's autobiographies to support second language writers in her classroom as a way to apply many of the principles that make second language writing meaningful. According to Steinman (2007) these principles are "the bringing of the first language (L1) into the second language (L2) classroom, and to engage with students in constructivist learning." (p. 563). Steinman (2007) found that such an approach to second language writing in academic contexts was beneficial for many second language writers since they wrote with a low level of anxiety and were able to see academic writing as meaningful to their own way of using writing in academic contexts.

Another problematic area in the acquisition of academic writing as L2 is to assess the ability to write in English for second language writers. Huang (2009) points out in his review of the literature affecting ESL student writing that one of the major areas of concerns is to assess ESL writers due to the different cultural and linguistic background of ESL students present. Huang (2009) found that there is a gap in the literature on the assessment of ESL student writing. In particular, Huang (2009) identified three major areas of concerns. As Huang (2009) writes "Most studies examined the factors affecting the ratings of ESL composition written by graduate and undergraduate courses written at university level but did not compare ESL school writing with university ESL writing.

Second many studies were conducted with very few participants and the generalizability of the study was problematic in order to understand how to address ESL writing in different contexts. Third, according to Huang (2009) many studies just reported

numbers and their quantitative nature did not unfold the qualitative nature and the complex narrative of second language writing. Huang (2009) suggests that future studies on ESL writing should address the writing processes of second language writers by looking at different grade levels and by investigating the influence that teachers and instructors have on the performance of second language writers.

Hyland (2002) argues that research in writing issues and challenges to writing in as second language should address the following components: (a) assumptions about writing or what second language writers perceive writing in the target language to differentiate writing instruction accordingly; (b) investigate the nature of the second language writer to become aware and understand what the motivations and goals for writing in as second language; (c) provide a rich secondary literacy writing environment where second language writers can see the purpose and meaning of writing. Prior (1998) as cited in Hyland (2002) writes,

Actually writing happens in moments that are richly equipped with tools (materials and semiotic) and populated with others (past, present, and future). When seen as situated activity, writing does not stand alone as the discrete act of the writer, but emerges as a confluence of many streams of activity: reading, talking, observing, acting, making, thinking, and feeling as well as transcribing words on paper (p.193).

What writing in a second language means is to look at these challenges as opportunities for second language writers to become part of a richer writing process in the target language. Second language writers must become part of a rich writing environment in L1 to be able to see writing as meaningful and important to open up new ways of communication and interaction in the context in which writing takes place.

The literature review on challenges in L2 discussed some of the most compelling issues that the field of second language writing has been debating so far. These issues and challenges are far from over due the complex nature of second language writers who bring into the writing process different levels of proficiency in their L2, different cultural and social expectations to the task of writing in a second language. In turn, second language writing is a dynamic field (Matsuda, 2003) of inquiry in which the challenges and possible solutions to write in English as a second language will be investigated by bringing into the design of the studies different theoretical and methodological traditions to address the high diversity of the field of second language writing.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Framework System of Meaning**

The theoretical framework of the present study is based on the work of Vygotsky and, in particular, Vygotsky's concept of the system of meaning (Mahn, 2008). The importance of using this theoretical framework for data analysis lies in Vygotsky's quest "to study meaning through language" (Mahn, 2008 p. 2). By investigating L2's acquisition of academic writing within this particular theoretical framework, I will demonstrate how the participants in this study created meaning through academic writing using L2 academic writing conventions in English. In the following discussion, I will define system of meaning and present an operational definition of this concept for the present study. I will define the concept of *perezhivanie* as well, another important component of my theoretical framework, to explain the function of the environment in L2 academic writing acquisition and use for the participants in the study.

According to Mahn (2008, p.3), the concept of the system of meaning in Vygotsky's work captures "the dynamic and systematic nature of meaning." Mahn (2008) writes that

meaning “refers to the entity that is created through the unification of the thinking and speaking” (p.3). Individuals use language in various sociocultural situations to create meaning. As Mahn (1997) points out, words are used to express concepts that are part of a greater system of meaning that incorporates both the cognitive and the sociocultural.

Vygostky (1997a) analyzes the system of meaning using a diachronic or historical perspective. As Vygostky (1987) contends,

The internal relationships between thought and word with which we are concerned are not primal. They are not something given from the outset as precondition for further development. On the contrary, these relationships emerge and are formed with the historical development of human consciousness. They are not precondition of man’s formation but its product (p. 243).

As Mahn (2008, p.2) points out, for Vygotsky (1934), the “system of meaning, central to verbal thinking, is part of larger systems, the human psyche and the human consciousness.” Mahn (2008p.3) also emphasizes that Vygotsky (1997) states that “Meaning is not the sum of all of the psychological operations which stand behind the word. Meaning is something more specific-it is internal structure of the sign operation.” Language mediates the formation of meaning through the unification of thought and verbal thinking in various sociocultural environments to form concepts, and to act and change the sociocultural environment through mediated action. Vygostky (1999) sees language as being connected with other cognitive functions, including perception, volition, memory etc.

John-Steiner, Panofsky, & Smith (1994) argue that studying language within a sociocultural framework is important because language is used to convey meaning in any



human interaction. As a cognitive and sociocultural system, language is a tool for communication that helps individuals to make sense of their experiences in the environment by mediating between the mind and the signs that form the system of language.

Wertsch (1998) contends that individuals in society live and interact by using tools of mediation, both technological and linguistic. The system of meaning mediates between the individual and his/her sociocultural environment through unification of thinking and speaking processes in which language externalizes meaning formed through the internal processes of brain-mind activity.

The system of meaning is important in this study because L2 academic writing is seen as resulting from a mediated process that is internalized by the participants in order to understand how to enter into academic writing as a general system of knowledge and communication in an ESL 101 course.

Vygotsky (1997, p.133) writes that meaning is not found in “the sum of all the psychological operations which stand behind the word.” Rather, meaning is more specific and lies between thought and word (Robbins, 2011). According to Robbins (2011, p. 2), “Meaning is not equal to the word, not equal to the thought.” As Robbins (2011) writes,

Meaning cannot be understood to completely reflect higher mental functions as representing separate entities of individuals because consciousness for Vygotsky is primarily social; and, on the individual level, meaning incorporates sense (personal understanding at a point in time, a particular) and meaning (a stable understanding, such as an entry in a dictionary, a universal), all of which represent a dynamic unity (within a process) constantly being modified and transformed (p. 2).

Vygotsky (1997) suggests that language weaves together social and cultural relations that are inseparable from the cognitive processes that give language meaning in specific social and cultural contexts. Vygotsky (1999) sees meaning as resulting from a process where language and cognitive processes unify to make sense of the interaction between the individual and the sociocultural environment. Meaning is neither in language or in an individual's psyche but emerges through the unification of thinking and speaking processes.

Robbins (2011) argues that this is a crucial point in Vygotsky's study of meaning in language. According to Robbins (2011), meaning emerges when the individual is able to generalize meaning in language or generalize the meaning of a word within the system of language. Vygotsky (1997) writes that meaning represents a whole unit where thought and speech are united in verbal thought. As Mahn (2008) suggests, "Vygotsky's specific focus is on meaning that results from the unification of thinking and speaking processes" (p.4).

Mahn (2008) also points out that to understand meaning within the Vygotskian tradition, it is important to look at the concept of *znachenie slova*, or meaning created through language use, which is the unit that Vygotsky analyzes "to reveal the character and development of the unification of thinking and speaking processes in the individual psyche and in society." (p. 3) As Mahn (2008) writes,

Vygotsky analyzes *znachenie slova* as a process that has its foundation in the infant's physical brain and the elementary thinking processes with which humans are born and which develop in infancy-mechanical memory, involuntary attention, perception, etc. These elementary mental functions are shaped by the sociocultural situation into

which children are born and through their interaction with others and their environment (emphasis in original) (p. 14-15).

The concept of *znachenie slova* is important in the present study because the data collected on the acquisition of academic writing in L2 writers was analyzed by looking at the interaction between the writers and their environment-writing situations, writing tasks, interactions with the instructor, other second language writers, etc. in order to look at academic writing in a second language not as an isolated endeavor but as a complex and dynamic process that entails a qualitative change in the second language writer in their process of writing over time (Mahn, 2008, p.14-15).

The concept of *znachenie slova* is important in the theoretical framework because it points toward the importance of looking at academic writing not merely as an external system of knowledge and communication, but, more importantly, as a system that has been internalized by second language writers and that support them in forming and developing meaning through unifying their thinking and writing processes in the act of using academic writing as L2.

Vygotsky (1987), as cited in Mahn (2008), further discusses the importance of *znachenie slova*, contending that individuals interact with their environment through the use of signs and by ascribing meaning to these signs through social interaction, in which language plays a crucial role at the cognitive and social and cultural level. Mahn cites Vygotsky (1987) as stating, “To communicate an experience of some other content of consciousness to another person, it must be related to a class or group of phenomena.

Vygotsky (1987, p. 48) further explains that “generalization becomes possible only with the development of social interaction.”

In analyzing the concept of *znachenie slova*, Vygotsky points out that any action by an individual presupposes social interaction. Since writing is a dynamic and complex interaction of the individual using written signs or words within a writing environment, the concept of the system of meaning is crucial in the present study because it allows the researcher to look in depth at how second language writers were able to acquire and use academic writing in a second language within the different contexts of writing and genres in the ESL 101 course. Academic writing in this study is looked at as the ability of second language writers to use academic writing in different writing situations and to go through qualitative changes in their academic writing in English as L2.

The use of Vygotsky’s concept of the system of meaning in the theoretical framework of the present study facilitated the goal of looking at the qualitative changes through which second language writer participants went through during the study, including qualitative changes in their writing, their ability to use writing to connect and interact with their instructor, other peers, and course material in the ESL 101, and their use of academic writing to create and develop their ability to communicate using this highly specialized form of communication in academia.

The concept of *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky, 1934) in the problem of the environment is important in how meaning emerges from the interaction between the individual and the environment and how the individual makes meaning of his/her unique experience(s) in particular situations. As Vygotsky (1934) writes,

The emotional experience [perezhivanie] arising from any situation or from any aspect of his environment, determines what kind of influence this situation or this environment will have on the child. Therefore, it is not any of the factors in themselves (if taken without reference to the child) which determines how they will influence the future course of this development, but the same factors refracted through the prism of the child's emotional experience [perezhivanie](p.3).

The application of Vygotsky's concept of perezhivanie is used in the present study in investigating the function of the environment or situation in which the acquisition and use of academic writing took place and in investigating how the participants in the study were affected differently by the relationship between academic writing in a second language and the context in which this process of acquisition and use happened.

For Vygotsky (1934), perezhivanie impacts how we live and make sense of our experiences and situations. Learning is never an entirely objective, linear process. Learning and making meaning of our formal and informal educational experiences come from our interactions with environments and situations, and the ways in which we experience these, with both our logic and our emotions, and our ability to use our previous knowledge to make sense of novel situations.

Perezhivanie (Vygostky, 1934) is part of a complex system of meaning in a social and cultural context at the confluence of the subjective, the individual, and the social, which gives an individual the ability to use communication and language to make meaning of an objective situation and to systematize this meaning according to his/her level of

understanding of the situation and ability to use thinking processes to delve into his/her experiences at a deeper level.

The translator of Vygotsky (1994), as cited in Mahn (2008, p.21), claims that “the Russian term [perezhivanie] serves to express the idea that one and the same objective situation may be interpreted, perceived, experienced or lived through by different children in different ways.” This notion, as used in the present theoretical framework to analyze the academic writing of ELL students, is crucial to looking at academic writing not as an isolated act of producing a text but at the confluence of the individual writer and the “ensemble of social relations” (Marx, 1933, p.473). Thus, academic writing is at the crossroads of the individual ELL writer and the system of academic thinking and language that enables the writer to communicate his/her thoughts through a highly specialized system of meaning embedded in academic writing.

Vygotsky (1934) writes that to understand the development and qualitative changes in individuals, we must attend to the dynamic interactions between the individual and the environment. According to Vygotsky (1934, p.2), we are in the position to do so if we “approach environment not with an absolute but relative yardstick.” What this means is that the environment and the individual’s relationship with the environment are not crystallized or frozen in time but go through different stages of qualitative change due to the transformations that the individual experiences in his/her lifetime (Vygotsky, 1934). Thus, as Vygotsky (1934, p.2) points out, “one should always approach environment from the point of view of the relationship which exists between the child and its environment at a given stage of his development.” For the present study, the problem of the environment means that second

language writers did not learn or use academic writing in a vacuum, but rather, in systematic interaction with the environment in which different constituents played a major role in L2 acquisition and use of academic writing.

The individual interacting with the environment and learning from his/her experiences is part of a larger system of social interactions within a social system. Vygotsky (1978) writes that without the social component, learning would not occur at all. As Leontiev (1981, p.46), one of Vygotsky's collaborators, writes "if we removed human activity from the system of social relationships, it would not exist...the human's individual activity is a system in the system of social relations." Social systems, individual activity, and human experience are part of a complex system that can be analyzed only by looking at the way in which these components interact within a sociocultural system.

It is important to address briefly the theories of Gee (1997) in the context of this theoretical framework as well. Gee (1997) writes that cognition is:

A system made up of the world, the mind, and society, a system in which boundaries between these three are not airtight and clearly separable. We can take routes through the system: Actions can change patterns that, in turn, change cultural models; cultural models can modify patterns that, in turn, cause us to react in certain ways, ways that may change patterns and, in turn, cultural models (p.241)

Gee (1997) points out that cognition and the learner's dependence on a social network is crucial for engaging in any learning process and activity. Vygotsky (1934/1978), Leontiev (1981), and Gee (1997) look at the learner's ability to cognitively interact with the

environment and be aware of his/her experiences in any learning situation that will eventually lead to the acquisition of knowledge in a particular area of human endeavor.

The importance of clarifying this aspect of the theoretical framework of the present study is due to the importance of understanding that individuals in the same situation will not experience it or learn from it in the same way. This is crucial in the present study because an in-depth analysis of the participants' academic writing in the same college course will be presented and discussed in light of pedagogy of L2 academic writing that takes into account differences in the learning processes of second language writers. As Vygostky (1934) writes,

It [pedagogy] ought to always be capable of finding the particular prism through which the influence of the environment on the child is refracted, i.e. it ought to be able to find the relationship which exists between the child and its environment, the child's emotional experience [perezhivanie]. In other words, how a child becomes aware of interprets [and] emotionally relates to a certain event. This is such a prism which determines the role and influence of the environment on the development of, say, the child's character, his psychological development etc. (p. 5)

What this means is that an individual's experiences in formal and informal situations (educational environment, social events etc.) are always prismatic and produce different interpretations of the same situation, depending on the individual who is experiencing it. As Vygostky (1934) suggests, the ability of the individual to make sense or meaning of a situation does not lie in only one realm of the individual's experience but rather, in the systematic interaction between the cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural component of that experience.



In discussing the present theoretical framework, we must also analyze how the system of meaning plays a paramount role in the individual's ability to generalize meaning through the use of signs in sociocultural contexts (Vygotsky, 1997b). According to Mahn (2008, pp.14-15), "social interaction is impossible without meaning." Thus, meaning is a two-sided process, involving both the individual aspect of meaning and the historical and social development of meaning in language. The individual speaker or writer transforms meaning qualitatively by interacting with a situation in the environment.

The confluence of the subjective and the social and cultural allows meaning to be generalizable and creates a system of meaning in social and cultural contexts that is adopted and used by a community of speakers and writers (Vygotsky, 1934, 1987). Meaning is not found just in society or in the psyche of an individual speaker or writer but rather, at the confluence of two powerful forces: (a) the sociohistorical conditions of society, and (b) the individual consciousness of a speaker or writer. It is through words or linguistic signs that these two forces come together to shape the language and psyche of speakers and writers in a social and cultural system and allow meaning to emerge in a systematic mode of relationships (Mahn, 2008).

Thus, meaning as a complex system is at the core of the communicative needs of a speaker or writer in the process of using language for knowledge and communication. Meaning as a system to understand social and cultural experiences continuously undergoes changes created by the interrelationships between the social and cultural conditions of society and the individual speakers or writers being part of a sociocultural community (Mahn, 2008). At the same time, the system of meaning is shaped by the experiences of individuals in society. Vygotsky's concept of the system of meaning is used in the present study to

investigate how L2 writers use academic writing to formulate their thoughts and ideas in a different system and how thought takes a different shape in a different language (Mahn, 1997).

As Vygotsky (1987, p. 280) points out, “Where the external speech involves the embodiment of thought in the word, in inner speech the word dies away and gives birth to thought.” Vygotsky (1987) sees language as both sociocultural and cognitive. Vygotsky (1987) also brings to the fore language learners’ abilities to use their conceptual system to acquire a new system of meaning and communication. Thus, second language writers use L2 writing as a way to express their thoughts and ideas in a new system of knowledge and communication and to transfer their thoughts into a new language with different expectations and needs.

As discussed above, individuals go through qualitative changes in their interactions with the environment, and meaning changes due to their different perceptions and experiences with the environment over time. As Vygotsky (1934) argues, individuals are “always dealing with and indivisible unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics, which are represented in the emotional experience” (emphasis in original) (p. 19).

The importance of using the system of meaning to analyze the acquisition of academic writing in second language writers is based on the fact that Vygotsky’s framework allows us to see the emergence of academic writing as a process in which second language writers engage with the system of academic writing by interacting with it differently from other second language writers engaged in the same process, because their individual systems

of meaning yield different understandings of academic writing in English. In this study, the concept of the system of meaning allows us to see how second language writers have different understandings of academic writing in a second language. Each participant interacted with academic writing in English as L2 by using their individual system of meaning and, therefore, came to different understandings of academic writing as L2. As Vygotsky (1987, p. 279), in Mahn (2008, pp.275-276), maintains, “the sense of a word is never complete and that sense as the aggregate of all the psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as the result of that word.” The concept of the system of meaning allows the individual to continuously understand and change meaning in language through cognitive interaction with the environment through language. Meaning changes through a changing perception of the individual interaction with the environment by using a system of signs in language. At the same time, the system of meaning changes through the interaction of the individual in the unification of the thinking and speaking processes. The individual both affects and is affected by the system of meaning in understanding his/her experience in relation to a situation mediated by language in a sociocultural context.

It is important to point out that language and writing, and academic writing specifically, is continuously transformed by the individual and the environment in which it is used. Academic writing is a very highly specialized system of meaning where English language is the material representation of academic thinking. Both the individual and the environment are co-responsible for the development of academic thinking through writing.

As Mahn (2008, p.27) contends, meaning is always transformed in the interplay between the individual and his/her sociocultural context:

The way in which sociocultural meaning is transformed as it is internalized can be seen at the level of single words in the difference between the individual's sense of the word and common usage based on dictionary meanings. The word mother (emphasis in original), for example, invokes for every individual a very personal sense of the word. At the same time there is a common understating of the sociocultural meaning of the word denoting both the biological and cultural relationships. This divergence exists in both the internalization processes. Language can never fully express an individual's sense of a concept or thought (p.27).

In looking at L2 academic writing, three important considerations come to the fore. First, academic language, specifically in L2 English, is always used in the dual mode of the conventional and the subjective by the L2 writer. Academic vocabulary and the conventions of academic writing and its overall system of meaning are appropriated by the L2 writer in the act of producing meaning via a highly specialized system of writing and communication.

Second, the use of academic writing, and its use in L2 contexts, is never a verbatim application of academic conventions. The academic conventions used by second language writers are always qualitatively transformed by the L2 writers who constantly interact with the academic environment through writing and such interaction leads to qualitative transformations in the L2 writer due to an active learning process that takes place in when academic writing is used to produce meaning (Mahn, 2008; Bakthin, 1984, 1986). Academic writing is a system of meaning that emerges in specific contexts of use or when academic thinking must be used to convey specific knowledge in a discourse community or academic community specifically.

Third, academic writing as system of communication and knowledge is always connected to the environment in which learning takes place, through a continuous interaction between the learner's intellect and the system in which this learning takes place. Academic writing is produced by the L2 writer as a system of communication and knowledge. Academic writing in L2 is embedded in cultural and subjective layers due to the nature of the L2 writer and his/her sociocultural and educational trajectories, which enrich the complex connotations of academic writing through time.

**Sociocultural aspects of meaning.** Bakhtin and Medvedev (1978) contend that the sign has meaning because it performs its function in a community along social, cultural, and historical lines. As Bakhtin and Medvedev (1978) argue, the sign is historically and socially significant for speakers [writers] of a community because it allows members of the community to dynamically play with meaning and find new and significant ways to communicate specific views of the world or experiences. Meaning is seen not from a social and cognitive perspective, but, rather, is analyzed in the fabric of language in its social and historical becoming, giving us the opportunity to see academic writing in a second language as a transformative act in which the second language writer uses its rhetorical structures to communicate in his/her discipline or discourse community.

Meaning from a sociocultural perspective presents an important characteristic that can be defined as dialogical (Bakhtin, 1984). Bakhtin (1984) contends that dialogism is a central element in all languages. Dialogicality in languages means that language is always crossed by class, ideological, and political forces that tend to promote or repress the opportunity for

communication among the members of a linguistic community. Dialogism is for Bakhtin (1984) at the core of any discursive practice in a community of speakers [writers].

Dialogism is a process that allows speakers [writers] of a community use language to create social, cultural, and personal relationships that lead members of a community to give meaning to their experience in the world. Bakhtin (1984) sees dialogism as a process to promote meaning and communication by allowing its individuals to have voice, identity and positionality despite differences in class, gender, and power relationships. According to Bakhtin (1984), dialogism is the core component of any system of communication and meaning in a community. When we speak or write, we use the specific system of meaning of that community to create new relationships or maintain old ones.

Bakhtin (1984) writes that language always enters different spheres of discourse and communication, and dynamically creates opportunities to create new meaning through dialogicality. Dialogicality creates variation in meaning, and the system of meaning is affected by the dynamic nature of discourses in any community of speakers and writers (Bakhtin, 1984). The dynamic and ever changing condition of language means that any system of meaning in language is continually enriched by individuals in a community of speakers and writers. Language and meaning are never at rest in their sociocultural and sociohistorical conditions.

Bakhtin (1981) lays out the foundational principles of the dynamic and ever changing nature of language, writing,

Any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications; open to dispute, charged with value, already

enveloped in an obscuring mist-or, on the contrary, by the ‘light’ of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien values and accents. The word, directed towards its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environments of alien words, value-judgments and accents, and weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (p. 276).

Thus, language is always found at the crossroads where speakers and writers of different social, cultural, and linguistic traditions meet. Speakers and writers appropriate the language of their community and historically transform it through a continuous interplay of spoken and written discourse.

The above analysis of the system of meaning and of meaning in social and cultural contexts provides the theoretical framework in which the data collected in the present study of how academic writing is acquired by L2 writers was analyzed. Meaning for L2 writers means that thinking through using academic language is impacted by the coming together of the different sociocultural dimensions of academic writing, which allows the writers to become a part of academic communities and to access their specialized knowledge.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Case Study Methodology**

I used case study methodology in the present study. Merriam (1998) defines case study as an end product where the researcher engages with “An intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit (p.27). The four case studies of the present study fall into Merriam’s definition of case study and emphasize the importance of investigating the phenomenon of L2 writing in second language writers within “a real-life context.” (Yin, 1994, p.13) Case studies were my choice in the attempt to capture the in depth meaning and contexts in which the participants acquired and used academic writing in the ESL 101 course during spring 2008.

The use of case study methodology gave me the opportunity to systematically analyze the data emerging from my observations in the classroom, the interview with the participants, the L2 conference, the researcher’s journal, and the informal conversation with the participants, the instructor, and the SI tutor. I claim with Stake (1995) that case studies are integrated systems that allow the researcher to find the boundaries within which data can be collected, analyzed, and discussed in a study to make sense of a particular phenomenon. The use of case study research helped me to see how my participants were able to make sense of their experiences in the ESL 101 course, how they acquired academic writing in English as L2 and how their efforts resulted in a better integration and participations of academic discourses through writing.

Merriam (1998) maintains that case studies present specific elements that define and characterize what a case study is and its importance in qualitative research. According to



Merriam (1998) case study are particularistic since they focus on “a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon.” (p.29) Case studies are descriptive because the researcher uses “thick” (p.29) description of the phenomenon under investigation. Case studies, as Merriam (1998) points out are also heuristic and particularistic. Case studies are heuristic because “illuminate the reader’s understating of the phenomenon under study.” (p.30) They are particularistic because they focus only on specific or particular aspect of the phenomenon under study and give the researcher the opportunity to go in depth in the investigation of a particular phenomenon.

As a qualitative researcher I decided to use case study methodology due to my interest in becoming aware and understand the similarities and differences that the participants in the study were showing in their acquisition and use of academic writing in the ESL 101 course. I was interested in capturing and analyzing the participants’ challenges to acquire and use academic writing as L2 to become part of the academic discourse community in higher education by using a high specialized system of writing and communication.

I deemed that the use of qualitative methodology was appropriate to see the processes and the contexts through which the participants in this study were acquiring and using academic English in ways that could be unique to their particular social, cultural, and linguistic background not to mention their individual characteristics of learning. Merriam (1998) points out that a case study is used by the qualitative researcher when the researcher wants to bring to the fore unique characteristics of the participants in the specific contexts in which the phenomenon is investigated. Merriam (1998) writes

Case study is a particularly suitable design if you are interested in process. Process as a focus for case study research can be viewed in two ways. “The first meaning of

process is monitoring: describing the context and population of the study, discovering the extent to which the treatment of program has been implemented, providing immediate feedback of a formative type, and the like. The second meaning of process is causal explanation: discovering or confirming the process by which the treatment had the effect that it did (p.33).

The use of case study methodology was important to investigate the processes through which the participants in the study acquired and use academic writing as L2 in the ESL 101 course during spring semester 2008. I gained a better understanding of the participants' ability to acquire and use academic writing in English by using case study methodology in the different contexts in which I observed and interact with them. In other words, I was able to look at the participants' experience in the acquisition and use of academic writing from different perspectives or through the participants' prisms of the participants (Vygotsky, 1934).

### **Course Description**

The ESL 101, Composition I: Exposition was taught during spring semester 2008. The course my participants were taking was designed to help ESL students to understand the basic of academic writing. According to the syllabus, ESL students had to use academic writing "to investigate issues that are important to you and in so doing develop habits of mind that are important for writers: assessing audience expectations, reading critically; engaging with others' ideas; developing control over surface features of your text; and discovering, cultivating, and being reflective about your writing process" (p.1). This was the main goal of the course and what the syllabus had as opening section.

The book used for the course was the following: *New Directions: Reading, writing, and critical thinking*, 2nd edition. The book presented a very clear a predictable sequence of assignments divided into sections. The book presented five sections as follows: (a) Intercultural Communication where students were exposed to sample essays in English to understand main ideas and supporting details. The topics covered varied from American values to humor; (b) Education where the essays dealt with different aspects of American education from different cultural perspectives to introduce students to purpose and audience. Students were exposed to the values of American education from a white dominant perspective to more an intercultural one. One of the essays on education was exposing students in the ESL 101 course to what it means to see education from an intercultural perspective and as a Native American in particular; (c) the structure of an essay, the writing process, writing with sources represented the core of the book since students had to become aware and understand how to use academic writing by following and applying its conventions in English.

Sections three, four, and five of the textbook introduced students to figure of speech, summarizing and paraphrasing and tone respectively. The book, as I pointed out before, followed the same predictable pattern. The different parts of essay writing were introduced and discussed by exposing students to actual sample essays and by a specific emphasis on the particular component of the essay ESL students had to learn. The book, overall, was easy to follow, and did not present particular challenges, since from informal conversation I had with my participants, they were saying that the textbook was not an issue in terms of difficulty of assignments, language, and vocabulary.

The required work and grading scale for the ESL 101 course required students to complete eight assignments during the course of the semester. The assignments were graded as follows: (a) participation/attendance 30 points, (b) portfolio 400 points; (c) formal paper 1, 2, 3, 100 points each; (d) reading journal 150 points; (e) free writing 60 points; (f) reading/writing groups 60 points. The grading rubric was scaled from A 95% to C- 70%. The instructor put a note in bold type “Note: You MUST get a C or higher to pass English 101” (p.1). The rest of the syllabus was explaining in details the assignments, the use of the rubrics and policy regarding late assignments. According to the syllabus, the instructor was not accepting late assignments and students were penalized with no points.

Two interesting parts of the syllabus caught my attention: (1) the part of the syllabus on the conferences and (2) the part of the syllabus on plagiarism. Conferences were schedule periodically, 3 times during the semester to allow students to sit with the instructor to discuss the students’ progress on the current assignment. As stated by the instructor in the syllabus “These conferences are mandatory, and failing to attend will affect your grade. Missing a conference session is equivalent to missing an entire week of class (3 days) and will be treated as such. I participated in the conferences and tape recorded them during the course of spring semester to observe and understand how my participants were interacting during the conferences and what type of feedback was given by the instructor of the course.

The part on plagiarism in the syllabus was very articulated and spelled out in very minute detailed. The instructor bulleted the most evident cases on plagiarism by pointing out the following issues: (a) failing to quote material taken from another source; (b) failing to cite material taken from another source; (c) submitting writing that was written by another person or for another class; (d) submitting writing that was substantially edited by another

person. The section of the syllabus on plagiarism explained by using the same format (bulleted points) the consequences for plagiarizing a paper and the procedures followed by the University. In turn, students were aware, according to the syllabus about the consequences for such an action.

The last section of the syllabus was addressing the issue of using cell phones and text messaging devices during instruction time and the format of the paper. The instructor was very clear about the use of cell phone in the classroom by stating “when in class you are not available to answer calls or text to others. Disruptions of this sort will not be tolerated.” (p.4). The section of the syllabus dealing with formats clearly stated that all written assignments had to be typed, double-spaced using Times New Roman with a 12 point font and use of appropriate margins.

### **Instructor’s Ritual**

I observed the ESL 101 course twice a week during the spring semester 2008 with a duration time of 50 minutes three times a week. The class was following a very predictable pattern. At the beginning of the class, the instructor was giving the announcements concerning the activity for the day and upcoming assignments students have to turn in before the deadline. The announcements were always followed by questions the instructor was asking students on what was going on in their college life and if they had any questions before the beginning of formal instruction.

The activities were always written clearly on the board and students were guided by the instructor on each and every step of what they had to do. Besides the directions written on the board, a power point presentation was the main tool to go in detail during instruction time. The power point slides were not containing too much writing since they were

emphasizing what to do in the classroom. For instance, when the instructor was explaining how to write a narrative essay, the PowerPoint slides presented sentences such as “Narrative is to describe an experience or events,” or “Narrow your topic when you write your narrative.”

The slides were bulleted with the steps to follow on the different parts of writing discussed during the class. The instructor was using a simple format of the PPT and was not reading from the slides but was using the slides to help students focus on his explanation of important issues in academic writing. The students had their textbook open during the instructor’s lecture and they were following what the instructor by relying on the book and also on the handouts given at the beginning of the class. When the instructor was explaining in detail what to do for the first essay on intercultural communication, the instructor was supplementing what the book presented as a good narrative essay with his handout since he wanted to make sure that students in the ESL 101 course understand what to do once they started writing the narrative essay.

During my observation I noticed that the instructor maintained a very good eye contact with the students and was always very attentive in addressing the questions of the students during instruction time. Also, the class was not structured as lecture format but was very interactive since the instructor was always encouraging students to ask questions during instruction and to discuss any issue related to the lesson of the day. What caught my attention during my classroom observation was the use of funny stories and humor on the part of the instructor to help students stay focus by making the class enjoyable. The strategy used by the instructor was to weave these funny stories with the content of the class to enrich the instruction with a light touch. Stories usually were introducing American culture in the

context of academic writing to help ESL students understand the relationship between culture and academic writing.

An important part of the classroom rituals was the presence of a SI or Supplemental instructor from CAPS (Center for Academic Program Support) to help ESL students with their academic writing assignments. The idea to have a supplemental instructor was developed in coordination between the Department of English and CAPS. The rationale behind such a system of academic writing support lies in the analysis of the data on writing proficiency in academic writing for ESL students that at the time were low or presented issues of proficiency in form and content in their academic writing.

At the time of my study I was part of CAPS as a language tutor in Italian and I was coordinating the language tutors in the Center of Academic Program Support at the University of New Mexico. I was able to talk to the writing instructors and the SI instructors and understand what their role was when sitting in the ESL 101 course. They told me that they were observing the classroom, analyzing the writing assignments of the course and developing intervention plans for supporting ESL writers in writing academically in a second language.

Every time instruction was over, the SI spent 10 minutes talking to the students asking them what they need from her. She was jotting down the issues and questions of the students and asking them to make appointments to the writing studio in CAPS to go over their papers and address their concerns in the specifics. I observed and noticed that my participants used the SI and CAPS writing studio often during the ESL 101 course. This is supported by the data collected. The interviews, the conferences, and the final reflection

papers mentioned CAPS as an important system of support in their acquisition of academic writing as a second language.

My participants said in the data mention red above that CAPS via the SI (Supplemental Instructor), the instructor of the course, and group reviews with their peers were very important components for improving their academic writing in the ESL 101 course and be ready to write academic papers in the other course they were going to take. The participants in the study reported in the data that such systematic system of support was crucial to transition to academic writing in a second language because they knew that they were not left alone in their efforts to write academically in English; a language that they were discovering during their first semester in the ESL 101 course.

The seating arraignment of the class was with desk in a row with students always facing the instructor, the board, and the power point presentation. From my observation, I noticed that the classroom was set up for the traditional lecture mode of instruction. It was the instructor to make the classroom different by encouraging students to question the instructor and develop the ability to go beyond the traditional lecture mode. The classroom could accommodate around 30-35 students but if students had to move and walk to the instructor or rearrange the desks for some group discussion for incoming group projects, they had some problems to find space in the room.

During my observation of the classroom, I noticed that my participants were usually sitting at the back of the room. At the beginning I thought it was just a coincidence but after a while (one month), I noticed that this was a pattern. Also, I noticed that my participants were not very interactive in the classroom. They were much focused and were taking notes but



seldom they were asking questions or being pro-active in becoming leaders in group work in the classroom.

When I asked them why they were so quiet, Tom said to me that it was an issue of language, command of English, and education culture from their countries were you do not questions the teacher during classroom instruction. He told me “In my country, we never interrupt the instructor.” The other participants also pointed out that that they were more at ease in taking notes and if they had any questions ask the instructor after classroom or during office hours. They believed that this was a better way to learn then asking too many questions in the classroom.

The end of the class was following a very predictable pattern. The instructor had a wrap-up section the last 5-7 minutes of the classroom with questions students could ask on the topics discussed, doubts students had on assignments to turn in, and material to study for the test. After the end of the class some students were staying to talk with the instructor by sitting around his desk or sometimes students could talk outside for additional five minutes reviewing some of the notes they took during instruction time and to ask the instructor if they could meet during office hours or by appointment. What I noticed is that the instructor was always supportive of students’ needs and took time to talk to them without giving the impression that he was in rush after the class time and could not spend a couple of minutes with them.

### **Conferences**

The conferences between the instructor and the students in the course were an integral part of the classroom ritual but they were carried out at another location on campus, usually the student union building early in the morning from 8:30 until 11:00. The conferences were

held three times during the semester and students were sitting 10-15 minutes with the instructor to discuss the progress of their papers before turning in the final draft. The conferences always followed a predictable structure with the instructor sitting in front of the student and with the grading rubric and the paper on the table. Moreover, the instructor had his laptop on the desk to show students their drafts on the word system. The laptop was used to have a better visual of the track changes and for the instructor to keep track of the order of the students scheduled for the conference that particular day. Every time a student was over the instructor was writing in his laptop done and move to another student.

The conferences always opened with the greetings of the instructor that had the name of the student on the desk in his Conference Agenda and his laptop. The student had the paper and the rubric open on the table ready to begin the conference. The writing conferences procedures were explained by the instructor in advance in the classroom. I did not see any handout at the time but I observed that the instructor was going step by step on what to do the day of the conferences and some students asked the instructor some clarification questions on what to bring to the conferences. The instructor reminded the students to be on time, to bring their draft with the comments written in the form of track changes, and to be ready to discuss parts of their paper with him within the 15 minutes of the conference. Before beginning to discuss parts of the paper that needed to be rewritten, the instructor was asking the students ‘any questions before we begin?’ and then the conference started. Since my observations of the conferences were focused on my participants, I jotted down in my Researcher’s Journal that “Only Tom asked a question before the conference began on how to improve his paper... since he knew from the instructor comments on his paper that the paper needed major revisions. He must be worried about the grade for the research paper assignment.”

The instructor was always discussing the paper by referring back to the grading rubric. It was a step by step process where the students were following what the instructor was pointing out as something that needed to be changed before the final draft. The draft the student had on the table and on the computer screen of the instructor's laptop was with very specific comments on the track changes so the students knew what to discuss and why. The conference was a balance between oral and written feedback since the instructor was addressing issues or concern by going back and forth from the paper to the rubric and communicating his assessment of the written artifact in oral form.

The conferences were an opportunity for the students to discuss and refine their academic writing in more details since the format of the conferences I observed was one to one. Students could address specific questions, could ask the instructor more in depth questions on different areas of academic writing from grammar to usage or some lexical choices made during the writing of the first draft. I noticed once again that the instructor was always responding to the students' questions and issues with specific feedback by explaining, expanding, and often asking clarification questions to the students to make sure that he was addressing the questions posed by the students.

The same pattern that I observed during my classroom observation emerged during the tape-recording and observation of the conferences between the instructor and my participants. They were more willing to listen to the feedback from the instructor than asking questions during the 10-12 minutes of the conference. After I analyzed the transcripts from the conference and triangulate it with my observation notes, I noticed that my participants were just using words as "ok," "I see," "I got it" to signal that they were understanding the feedback from the instructor without interfering too much with the flow of the conference. I

did not ask the participants why they did not interact much since I believed that the same cultural pattern of “respect for the instructor” was transferred to the conferences from the participant’s classroom behavior. In turn, the authority of the instructor was always at the center of learning and interaction for the participants in this study.

The conferences closed with the instructor saying “you did a good job” “remember to address the points we discussed and turn in the paper according to the deadline in the syllabus.” After these last comments students left the table and another student was sitting with the instructor with the paper and the rubric ready for his/her conference. Each student had the same amount of time during the conference and could e-mail the instructor additional questions before turning in the final draft of the paper.

What I noticed during my observation of the conferences is that the place chosen by the instructor was at times noisy with people talking aloud or the sound of the different vendors’ voices and machines interfering with the conference with the student. Such a level of noise was at times interfering with what the instructor was pointing out on the academic writing produced by the student and I observed that some students were trying to lean forward to be able to understand what the instructor was discussing. Eventually, it seemed that the student was able to understand the oral feedback from the instructor by nodding his/her head or saying “ok,” “I got it,” “I see.” This was my perception at the time when I was observing my participants during the conferences and in the post interviews conducted and tape recorded the participants said that the most important points in the paper were clarified by the instructor. According to what the participant said, I can infer that the conferences were addressing the main issues of the writing assignments with clarity and specificity.

## **The Participants**

The participants for this study were four international students from four different countries: (a) Mexico; (b) Mongolia; (c) China; (d) Vietnam. I chose the four participants by visiting the ESL 101 class and with the permission of the instructor I introduced myself and explained that I was conducting a study on international students' academic writing at college level. I pointed out that participation was on a voluntary base and students did not need to do extra work and were not going to earn extra credit for participating in my study. I left a paper with a pen on the instructor's desk and asked students to sign, leave their e-mail addresses and phone numbers to be contacted later for a first meeting were they were going to sign consent form and a more detailed explanation of what to expect from them would be addressed.

At the end of the class, I found 4 names in the paper I left on the instructor's desk and the very next day I wrote an e-mail to the four voluntary participants to meet in order to explain them what the study was about, the commitment on their part and their rights as participants in the study. After a couple of days we agreed to meet on campus in the Student Union Building and go through the details of the study. I explained the participants that they were going to participate in a study on academic writing at the college level, I pointed out again that they were not required extra work form the ESL 101 course, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

I asked my participants to sign consent forms and explained them the timeline of the study. I showed them that they were going to have two group interviews-tapes recorded and that I was going to observe them in the ESL 101 course twice a week. I also told the participants that I was going to observe the conferences between them and the instructor, ask

their written samples and other relevant material and that I was going to keep the data locked and only the researcher could access the data and that the data were not going to be shared with any third part.

I left the participants free to choose their pseudonyms since I did not want to impose any fictitious name. The participants chose their pseudonyms and were used consistently throughout the study. I reminded them that for any concern regarding their participation in the study I was always available to discuss the issues and that we were going to keep in touch by e-mail or phone according to their preferences and busy schedule during the semester. I emphasized that our meetings for the interviews or discuss any important matter concerning the study could be rescheduled according to their needs. I asked them to e-mail me or call me a couple of days in advance to give me time to plan the rescheduling within reasonable time.

I distributed a language questionnaire to the participants of the study asking them to complete it and return to me when I was going to observe the classroom next week. The next class I received the questionnaire back and ask them if they had any questions or concerns they wanted to address after the class. The four participants told me that they were excited to participate in the study and that they were going to share with me all the important issues related to their academic writing in ESL 101 during spring 2008.

**Paola.** From the questionnaire and informal conversation I had with Paola (pseudonym chosen by the participant), she came from Mexico to study at UNM on an F-1 program (International Visa for Foreign Students) from her university. Paola's native language, according to the questionnaire is Spanish and she had 17 years of formal education in her country. Paola graduated from high school and at the time was on an exchange program form he country, Mexico. Paola wrote in her questionnaire that she had 4 years of

English instruction before studying in an US university. She wrote that her level of English in reading and writing was 2 on a scale of 5.

She was very specific in answering the question on the questionnaire on her goal in attending a US institution of higher education. Paola said that she wanted to improve her English and to know more another culture and to improve her own life. The last question was an open one. Paola wrote “I want to continue study in here so I have to learn as much as I can because I have to have good English to get into my master”. Paola’s quote as reported here is an original transcription of what she said at the time in her questionnaire. All the transcriptions in the study were not been edited by the researcher and were reported as tape recorded or jotted down in the Researcher’s Journal as they were uttered by the participants in the study.

Paola was one of the most outspoken participants during my study. She was always very inquisitive during our interviews and informal conversation. Paola was always curious about American culture and her questions were always trying to understand her new environment from different points of views in particular Paola’s ability to connect to the other students, the instructors, and the university in general. Paola was very supportive of my study and was always willing to go in depth on any question asked during formal and informal conversations we had.

**Laura.** Laura was from Mongolia and was attending ESL 101 during spring 2008 with the goal to eventually be admitted to Nursing School at the University of New Mexico. She wrote in her questionnaire that she had 15 years of formal education in her country K-12 plus a college degree in medicine. She was fluent in Chinese Mandarin and had 7 years of formal English instruction in Mongolia. Laura reported in her questionnaire that “I could

understand the general idea about articles on the textbook and newspaper as well as write letters and articles in English.” According to what Laura said in the interviews later in the study she was able to use the Standard English learned in China to write in English in a way that she defined as comprehensible or as she said “people can understand what I write in English.”

Laura’s goal in attending the University of New Mexico was to become a nurse and have a career in the United States. She was committed, as she told me, to study hard and become a nurse. This was her dream and from her voice I could infer that she was very passionate about it. She also pointed out that the United States was the country where Laura was dreaming to live because she believed that the US could give her more professional opportunities.

Laura was concerned with her listening skills in English. She wrote in the last open question of the questionnaire that “It’s a challenge for me to listen lectures. I have to do my best effort to understand the professors and sometimes I can’t understand what they say. I have to spend more time on the study than the native students.” This was an important statement made by Laura in the questionnaire since she was aware of the difficulty learning a new language but she was committed to succeed by studying hard.

Laura was very shy as a student and participant. She never took the lead during the interviews and often she did not want to take to floor to add something on the questions asked. Laura was always very quiet. When I asked her why she did not want to say something more during the interviews on the questions asked she said to me that she did not feel conformable saying something more due to her respect for the interviewer and due to her



personality and problems with English. All these factors together presented Laura as a polite and shy participant in the study.

**Tom.** Tom is from Vietnam and was attending the ESL 101 course during spring 2008 to fulfill the University requirements for international students. Tom had 10 years of formal instruction in his country, studied English for three years in Vietnam before moving to the United States and wrote in the questionnaire that he had good command on written and oral English. He said that “I can understand and write a lot better than before when I first came to the U.S.A.”

Tom wrote in his questionnaire that his goal was to earn his B.A. and M.A. in the USA in Business and then go back to Vietnam to develop something there. He was telling me when he gave me the questionnaire back that his idea was to improve the economy of Vietnam by looking at the US economic model and to open Vietnamese economy to the global market. Also, he wanted to see his country and his people with more wealth in the future. According to what Tom said in the open question at the end of the questionnaire, he was really enjoying studying and living in the United States. He wrote “People here are very friendly.”

Tom’s was always looking at the positive side of things. In our informal conversations he said that he was lucky to be in the United States and study to earn his degree in a very important country. He believed that this was the opportunity of a life time to be able to be better educated and eventually giving back to his country by working to improve its economy. Tom’s was a very pleasant participant with a brilliant conversation and a taste for humor and jokes and to always make the interviews and our informal conversations very positive moments during my study.

**Susan.** Susan is from China and her first language is Mandarin Chinese. Susan had twenty years of formal instruction in her country and her level of English was good in relation to writing and reading skills. She wrote in her questionnaire that she could read books and magazines in English but writing was a concern. Susan said that writing was good but not enough for an academic course in English. She wrote “I have been here for eight months with 10 years of formal instruction in English in my country. Now I am experiencing the culture shock. Everything is changed. It is difficult for me to adapt new environment.” When I asked her what were the issues she said it was the language but also the relationship with people in the United States. She thought that people in the United States are not as close as people in China. She was missing the sense of closeness and community from her country.

Susan was shy but also very concerned with respecting her cultural and social role as a wife within Chinese cultural patterns. She told me after the class while she was giving me the questionnaire that the expectations were to always put her husband first and then to think about herself. Susan wanted to get a degree in engineering but she was aware that family was coming first and that she had not to step out from her cultural and social role as a Chinese woman coming from a very traditional family in China.

I thought about Susan as concerned with her role as a student and as a wife (she was the only married participant in the study). She was shy but always willing to reason on very important issues regarding her life in the United States and her future plans. She was trying to see how to find always a fine balance between her professional dimension and her role as a wife within traditional Chinese cultural patterns.

## **Researcher's Positionality**

The choice to conduct the present study was made due to my positionality as an international student and second language learner. My interest in becoming aware and understanding how international students acquire and use academic writing in different academic contexts comes from my curiosity as a second language learner and as a researcher if international students and the participants in this study in the specifics went through the same issues, frustrations, and epiphanies as the researcher. I wanted to understand if my trajectory in learning academic writing had similarities or differences from my evolution as an international students and a second language writer in English in academic contexts.

The opportunity to design a study to investigate the trajectories of international students acquiring academic writing skills in English was a crucial moment as a researcher and as an international student as well. I had the opportunity to create not only a framework to collect and analyze data on how my participants were acquiring academic writing in English in higher education but also to continuously compare and contrast my experience as a second language writer with that of my participants. I was able to pose important questions to reel back and see the road I made by walking as an international student and scholar in the United States, to recall what it means to study, live and grow in another country and to being able to use a different system of writing and making meaning in a language different from my L1.

As an international student and scholar I was always interested in being part of a different educational institution and to critically acquire knowledge in another language that could allow me to becoming part of different discourses and practices in education. The questions that I had in mind during my study were: (a) what did motivate international

students to join a U.S. institution of higher education? (b) What challenges are they going to face in terms of writing and reading in English as a second language? (c) What are the issues in terms of writing for the academe that my participants are going to face? (d) Can they overcome the stumbling block of academic writing?

I have to say that these were the questions I had in my mind when I moved to the U.S. to study in an American university. I was aware that I was going to be part of a different academic culture and I was aware that academic expectations in terms of course load and requirements were going to be different. After many years in the United States I had the opportunity as an international PhD student to try to answer some of these questions by conducting a study on the acquisition of academic writing in international students in a U.S. institution of higher education. I was not expecting the same answers of course. I tried to look through my participants' eyes and dialogue with them as much as I could to let them speak and explain their journey in learning to write and to think in another language, to lay out and discuss their issues but also and more importantly their successes in being able to write and think academically in another language and see if their voices resonated or not with mine in the process of acquiring and using academic writing in English in higher education in the U.S.

### **The Writing Assignments**

The first day of the ESL 101 Course the instructor welcomed the class introduced himself and then let the students have a brief presentation of who they were, came from, and why they were in a U.S. university. The presentations were very short and each student in the ESL 101 course was very specific and concise on his/her nationality and purposes for studying in a U.S. university. The first day of the class I did not recruit my participants yet so

my focus was on the overall feeling with the class and how the interaction between the instructor and the class was going to be. What I noticed and jot down in my journal was “positive and friendly” due to the ability of the instructor to let students ask questions on the course shortly after their personal introductions.

After students were comfortable with the environment, the instructor went through the syllabus to explain the goals and objectives of ESL 101 and gave an extra two sheets labeled Due Dates and Reading Journals Directions. Before moving to the explanations of the syllabus the instructors distributed a copy of it to each student in the classroom and asked to follow him along. What was important for me at the time was the way or how the instructor explained the writing requirements of the ESL 101 course. I was interested in understanding the approach used by the instructor in guiding students in the classroom to understand the writing assignments in sequence and scope and making sure that the students were clear about what to do once the ESL 101 course entered what I defined as “the full speed of the semester.”

My first goal was to have a gist of what academic writing was going to be in the ESL 101 Course. By this I mean that my focus during the first observation was how the instructor was going to present and explain academic writing to the students in the ESL 101 Course to have a lens from which I could observe how students were going to interpret the instructor’s explanations on academic writing and therefore the ability of the students to acquire academic writing during spring semester 2008. In other words, I was interested in becoming aware and understand how my participants were going to engage with academic writing in ESL 101 Course, the way they were going to interpret the instructor’s directions on how to

write academically in English, and what they were going to take away with them at the end of the ESL 101 Course or the overall experience during the 16 weeks in the classroom.

The instructor began the explanation of the writing requirements for the ESL 101 Course by following the order of the syllabus and by using the extra two sheets of paper when the writing assignments were connected to Formal Writing Project and Reading Journals Directions to supplement the textbook in regard to what to do for these two writing assignments. I asked a copy of the syllabus and the two extra sheets of paper to follow along and to write side notes or questions that I might have for the instructor later. The first thing the instructor said was “Are you ready, guys?” with the class saying “Yes.”

After that the instructor asked students to look at the first page of the syllabus and make sure that the students knew the goal of the ESL 101 Course, what textbook was required, the grading system, and the outcomes of the course. After this part, the instructor focused very specifically on the writing assignments to make sure that students understood what to do for each of them. I will first talk about the format and content in which the syllabus and the two extra sheets of paper presented the writing assignments and will insert anecdotal facts from my observation, from the Researcher’s Journal to report the way the instructor was explaining the writing assignments to the classroom to gain a clear picture of this important part of the ESL 101

## Course

**Table 1. Sequence of Writing Assignments ESL 101**

February 23 to January 30	Intercultural Communication	Narrative Essay
February 25 to March 28	Mass Media and Technology	Research Paper
March 31 to May 2	Work	Letter Genres
May 12	Portfolio	Two previous essay and reflection paper
May 12	Reading Journal	Reflective Writing

**The syllabus and the extra sheets of paper.** The writing assignment part of the syllabus began with sequences (tentative schedules) on page 2. This part was organized as follows: (a) Sequence 1: Intercultural Communication (January 23 to February 20); (b) sequence 2: Mass Media and Technology (February 25 to March 28); (c) Sequence 3: Work (March 31 to May 2). The instructor pointed out that these were the topics for the ESL 101 Course and that students had the opportunity to work on the writing assignments through drafts before turning the final paper in. The instructor paraphrased what drafts means by saying “you have the opportunity to rewrite the paper before the due date by asking an appointment with me or to go to the writing studio in CAPS (Center for Academic Program Support) at UNM and work to rewrite the paper before the due date. I will go over this later on.” The second page of the syllabus presented the other writing assignments with the following sequence and explanation on how to write them: (a) Reading Journal; (b) Free Writing; (c) Writing Group and Peer Review; (d) Group presentation; (d) Formal Papers; Portfolio.

Reading Journal was explained in the syllabus as follows: The reading journal is an opportunity for you to explore different types of writing for different purposes. Through the reading journal, you will discover how writing can help you clarify what others have said and to discover new ideas and perspectives. The Reading Journal is also a place for you to begin to improve your English linguistic writing skills such as grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary. The Reading Journal will be collected twice during each sequence. The explanations of the instructor for this writing assignment were verbatim just following what the syllabus said and to add minor comments such as “are you clear on the assignment? Do you have any questions so far?” The Free Writing explanation was very short and the instructor just read it aloud without spending too much time on it: The free writings are an opportunity for you to demonstrate what you have learned or gleaned from the assigned readings for the day (p.2).

The instructor asked students to pick up the sheet Reading Journal Directions. The content of this artifact was as follows: (a) Purpose: The purpose of the reading journal is to give you an opportunity to practice your written English skills via different medium and to help you begin exploring the different ways in which you can express yourself in English. It is also a place where you can experiment with different organizational patterns, grammatical structures and vocabulary, so that you can strengthen your expressive skills in English. But most importantly, the Reading Journals provide you with an avenue for exploring ideas and for developing your critical thinking skills, both essential skills for college success; (b) Reading Journal Entry Types: reactions to “Additional Readings” and Vocabulary enhancement. The two heading were followed by detailed explanations on the expatiations from the instructor on what to write and the points earned for each section.



Reactions to “Additional Readings:” (6 points). The textbook offers several “Additional Readings” at the end of each chapter. You are to choose TWO (2) (emphasis in original) of these articles, read them and then write a 1 and a half to 2-page reaction. At the end of each article, the book provides writing prompts/topics that you can choose to write on your own or you may choose your own topic as long as it relates specifically to the article you have read. Your reactions may be expressions of your own experiences, disagreements with the author, poems, short stories, editorial type opinions, business proposals, marketing plan, etc...

Students seemed to understand what the instructor was asking them to do and just some clarification comments were made on what the instructor meant by “expressions of your own experiences.” The instructor said that this part of the course was to use writing in a more personal way. The instructor said to the students that writing here must be something that comes from your personal point of view on what you read and must express your opinion on the reading by choosing whatever forms of writing you like.

I jotted down a comment in my observation journal: “Writing space is addressed in this course...ESL students have the opportunity to play with writing...great!” I believe that this opportunity to explore writing spaces was very supportive of ESL writing in a university course and that academic writing was used to open up more writing spaces for international students. I made a note to return to this point when I had the writing assignments from the participants, the conferences tape-recorded, and the interviews to confirm or not what I observed at this point in time of my study.

Vocabulary enhancement: (6 points). The vocabulary development is essential to language learning and growth. For each Reading Journal entry, please write out 10 (TEN)

vocabulary words that are NEW for you. These words can come from the “Additional Readings” or from the “Core Readings” in the text. Include the following for each vocabulary word: (1) write the vocabulary words in your journal; (2) identify the kind of word, (verb, noun, and preposition); (3) give a definition; (4) use EACH word in an original sentence, NOT one from your dictionary or from the book.

This part of the explanation or the reading journal and the overall explanation of this writing assignment for the ESL 101 Course was done by the instructor in a balance between reading aloud the directions of the writing assignment and use paraphrasing to clarify some of the points of the writing assignment. For instance, in my journal I quoted what the instructor said on the difference between writing sentences from the vocabulary and writing an original sentence. He said: “when you copy from the dictionary, you often do not think the meaning of the word in context. If you use the word in a sentence of your own you can see how to use that word because you make an effort to get the meaning in the sentence.” My comment from my Researcher’s Journal was: “More space for ESL students to practice academic writing?” Wait for the data and return on it later.”

Writing groups and peer review was more detailed and specific: peer review groups will be formed early in the semester. This will be your peer group throughout the semester. Peer review groups are opportunities for you, as students, to read each other’s writing and to help one another strengthen your writing skills. When we have a peer review group session in class, you will be expected to participate in the group. Furthermore, these groups are to be supportive, helpful, and collaborative at ALL TIMES. (Emphasis in original) Criticism is part of the writing process, but criticism can be both destructive and constructive. Destructive criticism only hurts and anger individuals. It will not be tolerated in this class. All criticism is

to be constructive. Writing is a skill that takes time to develop. All of us have strengths and weaknesses when it comes to writing. Use your strengths to help others to allow others to help you (p.2).

The explanation of the Writing Groups and Peer Review was longer and more articulated since the ESL students in the ESL 101 course asked questions related to what the expectations of this part of the course were. The instructor pointed out that the most important thing was to come to the class with questions on the draft written for that specific assignment and be ready to discuss, to share what students wrote on the specific assignment. Also, the instructor told the students to see this as an opportunity to compare and contrast different ways of writing from other students and learn from one another. Some students nodded and others had some follow-up questions on what to do in case they did not understand what to say during these Writing Groups and Peer Review. The instructor replied by saying that he was going to help them since he was going to circulate around the classroom and talk to the different members of the groups in case questions or issues came out.

I observed such a behavior in the instructor during one of my observations in the ESL 101 Course and during the Writing Groups and Peer Review. I noticed that the instructor was going from one group to the other and spend time with the group by sitting with them and helping them with questions they had during this classroom activity. At that time, I was already observing my participants in the Writing Groups and Peer Review and my focus was the way my participants were interacting in their groups and how the instructor was supporting them.

My four participants were divided into two groups or two participants per group with other international students. My participants were in a group of four. What I observed was that Paola and Tom were the most interactive in their groups by asking questions on the essay on intercultural communication. One specific point discussed in the group that I jotted down in my Researcher's Journal was: "It is interesting that you wrote in your essay that you were nervous and afraid of use English, said Tom to Paula. I wrote in my paper that I had the same kind of anxiety when I had to begin my first day at work!" The instructor was with the group at the time and commented: "Good point! Try to discuss this point in more details and tell me if you have questions." From my observations of the Writing Groups and Peer Review confirmed what the syllabus said on the goals and objectives of this part of ESL 101 Course giving students in the course a space to discuss their writing and develop a better interaction among them and the instructor and to see writing not as an isolated endeavor but as a collaborative process through discussion and improvement of their writing skills.

Later on during my observations, almost at the middle of spring semester 2008, I wrote down a question in my Researcher's Journal: "How are my participants interpreting what the instructor say on academic writing? The interviews, the first conferences, and the drafts tell me that they are getting the message but it is interesting the variation in the degree of understanding on what to do and write on the same assignment!" This note in my Researcher's Journal's was elicited by reading the track changes on the participants drafts and notice differences in the way they were writing or interpreting the explanations from the instructor on the different genres of writing they were to engage with. What was of high interest for me was to see that the same tool for feedback, the track changes used by the

instructor, were used by my participants with different degrees of understanding as I demonstrated in my data analysis in this study.

The narrative explanation for the essay to write on intercultural communication for the ESL 101 course was done by the instructor following the same strategy. The instructor used a sheet of paper with detailed explanations of what the definition of narrative was and what students had to write in terms of narrative. The sheet of paper was organized according to the following sequence here reported: (a) Assignment: Write a Narrative! (Emphasis in original) Your narrative should describe in detail an experience you had with adapting to a new culture. This experience can be recent, such as an event that occurred during your first few days in Albuquerque. Or it can be an experience from your past, such as an event that occurred 10 years ago when you encountered a cultural difference. NOTE: You will have to NARROW your topic to a SPECIFIC EVENT that demonstrates the cultural difference you experienced. Examples of some broad topics areas:

- A misunderstanding of cultural expectations
- A miscommunication based on language differences
- A misunderstanding of the laws of the culture
- A misunderstanding of the classroom expectations
- A misunderstanding of interpersonal communication

#### EXAMPLES OF EVENTS

Dining Experience    Classroom experience    Dating Shopping

Greetings    Time    Space    Language

Choose an EVENT (possibly two) that occurred and describe this event in detail. This will require that you provide background information, i.e. what your culture expects, what you

expected, the series of events that lead up to the EXPERIENCE, your reaction to the event, and what you learned from the experience.

Remember to consider the following when writing your narrative:

- Audience & Purpose
- Content
- Organization (Introduction, Body, Conclusion)
- Comprehensibility
- Grammar, punctuation, spelling
- Essay format & Mechanics

LANGUAGE NOTE: Because this is a narrative, you will probably use the following (emphasis in original):

- Past tense verbs (pay attention to IRREGULAR past tense forms, i.e. eat-ate-eaten)
- Time transitions, i.e. then, next, after, before, when, after awhile, the next time, during, etc... The use of some of these transitions requires subordination.

WRITING REQUIREMENTS: (emphasis in original)

- Length: 2 and a half to 3 pages
- Double spaced, Font: Times New Roman, size 12
- Use Microsoft Word
- Follow proper formatting style (An example of a properly formatted essay in on WebCT in the Assignments folder). (*Emphasis in original*)
- Submit your essay via WebCT

The explanation of the narrative to write and submit for the course raised at least two specific questions from the students in the classroom: (a) what did the instructor mean by

comprehensibility and (b) the level of detail to put in the essay. The instructor's response was that comprehensibility meant to use clear exposition of ideas when writing the essay and that he was going to address this point in the next class or two with more examples to discuss so students were ready to write the essay with good models in mind. The second question was clarified by the instructor by pointing out that when students write their narrative, they need to think that the reader does not know much about the topic and the experience of the writer and that details help the reader understand what the experience is and why is important for the writer. I went back to the textbook to compare and contrast the definition of narrative in the textbook with the one used by the instructor to see if the instructor was attempting to be more specific and to simplify what students had to do during their assignment on narrative writing.

On page 55 of the textbook, I found a section defined as Essay Topic where the author outlined the main components of a narrative essay in 5 points. The five points in the textbook were presented and explained by (1) introducing the first author in the first section of the book Intercultural Communication, Gary Althen, and to invite the writer to discuss the main ideas on "ideas about what is right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, and so on" (par.1) on the main topic of American Values and Assumptions. The prompt for the first component in the narrative essays was: "Discuss major differences you've noticed in values and assumptions while in a foreign country or community that is culturally different from where you grew up. Did anything seem "wrong" or "undesirable"?"

The second component in the textbook suggested

Examine a cultural pattern in your country that you think a foreign visitor should be aware of in order to adjust more easily and avoid intercultural conflicts and

misunderstandings. Consider such things as values, beliefs, communication, styles, and concepts of time (p.55).

This second component attempted to support the writer to see narrative as an examination of a pattern or a system of ideas that the writer could use to explore narrative writing and present a coherent analysis of conflicts or misunderstandings. In turn, this second component was moving a step further towards a systematic presentation of what narrative is.

The third, fourth and fifth components of the narrative essay addressed the other basic elements of what it means to narrate in essay format: (a) description; (b) exploration of the topic; (c) discussion as final step in the narrative essay. The explanation for each of the five components of the narrative essay was very short and explained without many details in the textbook. Information how to write the narrative essay was kept simple and bare boned in the textbook with little or no elaboration on the part of the author.

A comparison between the handout used by the instructor of the ESL 101 course and the textbook revealed that the goal of the instructor was to make sure that students had specific and clear information on what to do when writing the narrative essay. The handout given by the instructor to the students in the ESL 101 course was not only more detailed but also better organized in its sections and more specific and easier to understand for the students in the course. I asked the instructor if he thought about the handout as a better way to support ESL students in the course and told me that he thought that the explanation in the textbook was good but not as clear as he thought for second language writers. The instructor wanted to provide students in the ESL 101 course with a handout they could rely upon when writing the narrative essay with specific signposts to follow during the writing process.



The Final Portfolio as discussed in the syllabus and the handout given by the instructor had two different goals. The Final Portfolio in the syllabus was an overview of what the students in the ESL 101 course had to do at the end of the semester. The Final Portfolio in the syllabus was as follows

The MOST IMPORTANT part of your grade. It is the culmination of all you've learned over the course of the semester, and it is graded accordingly. Worth approximately 40% of your grade, it will consist of TWO (2) earlier essays that have been extensively revised during the last week of class. You will also write a reflection paper in which you will be expected to articulate how you were able to bring some of the techniques you learned during the semester to bear on a deep revision, and what benefits this process afforded you. You cannot fail the portfolio and still pass English 101; while it is worth a bit less than half the total points, it represents the keystone, without which all your work throughout the semester will be for naught (p.2).

This summary of the Final Portfolio was followed up by a handout that the instructor gave to the students in the ESL 101 course during the first day of the class. The handout was very important because gave the instructor the opportunity to clarify some of the most important points of the Final Portfolio. The content of the Final Portfolio was very detailed. The first part was just reporting what laid out in the syllabus with due dates and what to put in the portfolio. The second part of the portfolio was delving into the specifics of what the instructor was expecting from the students at the end of the course. The explanation on the writing samples was broken down by pointing out the writing samples that could be inserted in the portfolio from the narrative essay to the letter of application for scholarship or colleges and universities. Also the instructor pointed out during the class period that he was expecting

revision in the content of the essays and he was talking and pointing out at the part of the handout he was holding in his hand in front of the students and on the PowerPoint. The details about the revision of the content were the following: (1) what more can you say about the topic? (2) Where can you reorganize your ideas so that they are clearer and express more concisely what you want to say? (3) Where can your ideas be strengthened with support from different articles that we read? (4) What connections can be stated more explicitly? (5) What grammatical and punctuation errors can you correct?

The last part of the hand out went through the nuts and bolts of the reflection paper by emphasizing the 100 points worth of the reflection paper, the length of it, and the specifics parts that the reflection paper had to have. According to the hand out I have, the reflection paper had to have five parts: (a) Reading and analysis where the students had to summarize, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize a variety of challenging texts, including their own and those of fellow students; (b) problem posing where students had to identify a central issue or question to address in their writing, and they will develop hypotheses, consider perspectives, and propose solutions that effectively respond to this issue/question; (c) writing decisions where students had to respond effectively to a writing situation by choosing and employing strategies (tone, style, content, organization, etc.) that are appropriate to that situation and its audience; (d) revision where students had to revise their writing by reconsidering and significantly reworking their ideas, conclusions, and writing decisions; (e) clarity and surface features where students had to write prose that was clear and free of errors in syntax, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and other surface features.

Students at that time did not ask many questions about the Final Portfolio since it was just the beginning of the semester and as the instructor pointed out he was going over its

important points later on when the due date was getting closer. My thoughts jotted down in the Researcher's Journal were "Is this reflection paper too structured? How much writing space does it give to the students? Need to find out by asking the instructor at the end of the class." I did ask the instructor and he told me that this was part of the curriculum from the English Department as a way of giving ESL 101 students strong foundations on all aspects of academic writing. According to what the instructor told me at the time it was a concern of the English Department of helping ESL writers to become not only familiar with academic writing in English but also and more importantly to provide ESL students with specific writing knowledge and tools to be successful in the other courses in their disciplines.

Another important part of the writing tools of the ESL 101 course was the rubric given to the students to understand how their academic writing was graded by the instructor. The rubric was not given at the beginning of the first class but was introduced by the instructor before the first writing assignment. The instructor gave the rubric to the students and went through the different parts to make sure that the students were aware of the grading criteria used by the instructor.

The copy of the rubric I obtained from the instructor was divided into five parts: (1) content with four subparts comprising the essay is on topic, the ideas are clear, the ideas are not redundant, the ideas are fresh and interesting; (2) organization divided into introduction, body and conclusion where each of these parts explained what the instructor was expecting to find in the essay; (3) comprehensibility defined as the essay is clear and easy to understand and ideas are developed logically; (4) grammar as subject-verb agreement is good, singular and plural agreement is good, correct use of vocabulary, use of verb tenses is good, other; (5) essay format and mechanics defined as correct use of punctuation, correct spelling, follows

corrects essay format. On the top of the rubric grades were put in the following fashion: (a) poor (F); (b) minimal (D); (c) average (C); (d) high (B); excellent (A). The rubric gave the instructor the opportunity to put checkmarks to indicate exactly the grade of the draft and what part to improve in the paper. The instructor told me that the rubric was a common one used in the English Department for grading papers in writing courses.

I did notice during my observation that the students and my participants did not have any questions on the rubric. After the class, I asked my participants if the rubric was difficult to understand to make sure that my perceptions from the observations were correct. The participants said that it was not difficult at all and it was easy to follow and use to revise their papers. As I already pointed out in another section of the data analysis, the rubric were used by the instructor during the L2 writing conferences to help students and my participants to go through the revision of their papers with more clear feedback and directions to follow. The rubric was used as a map to guide students' revision of their academic writing.

The last two writing assignments listed in the syllabus were Group Presentation and how to write Formal Papers for the ESL 101 course. The Group Presentation assignment said

At the beginning of the semester, you will be assigned a group for the semester. Your group will meet with me, your instructor, periodically throughout the semester. Your group, among other things, will work together to help each other become better writers and communicators in English. Toward the end of the semester, your group will give a presentation to the class. The presentation will be based on some of the readings we've done in class (p.2).

I did not observe the group working together but I observed the final presentations of the students. At the time I focused on the performance of my participants and the way the

Group Presentation supported their academic writing. They presented a summary of the readings by pointing out the pros and cons of their learning in the ESL 101 course. At the end of the 16 weeks the participants in the study had the opportunity to present a coherent picture of what it meant to read and write academically in English as a second language. I wrote down in my Researcher's Journal that "The participants are addressing and summarizing the major points of their academic writing and reading...They are pointing out that their ability to write, read, and think in English improved...they can see it from the final drafts written for the ESL 101 course and the ability to use academic writing for different writing tasks (I said genres considering the writing assignments for the course)."

### **The Collection of the Data and Writing Artifacts**

I collected the data and the written artifacts at specific points in time during spring semester 2008 to have clear checkpoints on the data collected and to analyze the data coming from my participants to understand their acquisition of academic writing during my study. I also collected the major writing assignments by checking on the dates in the syllabus and the instructor to make sure that the deadline was the one indicated in the syllabus. The writing assignments I collected for the data analysis in my study were snapshots along the semester to understand the changes in the use of academic writing in the different assignments my participants had to complete and turn in.

I conducted two interviews that I tape-recorded and transcribed. The first interview with the participants was conducted after three weeks in the spring semester 2008 with the goal to see what was their perception of the ESL 101 course and their perception of academic writing in L2 while the second interview was conducted at the end of the spring semester 2008 to capture the similarities and differences between the perception of the ESL 101 course

at the beginning of spring semester 2008 and their perception of academic writing at the end of the sixteen weeks in the course. I prepared a questionnaire for the interviews with 11 questions to try to address the main points in the ESL 101 course, to confirm or not the perceptions of my observations in the classroom, my analysis of the texts collected and to attempt to capture some of the changes my participants were going through at the beginning and the end of the semester in the ESL 101 Course.

I collected the following writing samples from the four participants in the study: (a) the intercultural assignment or first formal paper and the rubric used by the instructor to grade the paper; (b) the second formal paper written by the participants on a research assignment; (c) the “scholarship paper” where my participants had to write a formal scholarship application to experiment with the genre of the application letter for a potential grant; (d) the formal research group paper where the participants worked in group to write a research paper on a specific topic of their choice picked up from the textbook; (e) the final reflection paper and (f) the blue books or Reading Journals where students were experimenting with free writing on specific topics covered in the textbook. I did not collect all the drafts from my participants but only the ones that were significant for my study. By this I mean that I asked my participants to make a copy of the drafts that contained important comments from the instructor (track changes) that signaled issues or development in the academic writing of my participants and could give me the opportunity to delve into the changes in academic writing proficiency my participants were going through at the time of this study.

I also tape-recorded and collected the L2 writing conferences between the instructor and my participants on the same writing assignments presented above. I tape-recorded and

transcribed three L2 writing conferences as indicated in the syllabus with the goal to have a better understanding of the participants' development in their acquisition of academic writing in the ESL 101 course and the effectiveness of the instructor oral/written feedback on the participants in the study in relation to academic writing as L2. The conference transcriptions were put back to back with the corresponding paper and kept in a binder with all the other writing assignments and relevant material from the course.

Short five-minute post L2 writing conferences interviews were tape-recorded to have a better assessment of what the participants gained from the feedback coming from the instructor during the L2 writing conference. The reason for the short time of these interviews is twofold. My participants had to rush to another class but I wanted to capture the gist or feeling of the feedback given by the instructor during the interviews soon after the L2 writing conference was over. This gave me the opportunity to acquire important pieces of information on what my participants were thinking on the spot before forgetting the salient points of the L2 writing conference. The other important part of the post-conferences interviews was to capture some discrepancies that might emerged from what the instructor's feedback and the participant understanding of this feedback.

The other data for the study are the Researchers' Journal where I jotted down thoughts, impressions and perceptions of my observations. The Researcher's Journal was organized by date and topic of the day as a general guideline for my observation. However, the Researcher's Journal was not very structured for a reason. I wanted to write things that were emerging during my observation and write them down without any specific order and to analyze what I wrote later to make sense of the emerging data during the observations. The loose structure of the Researcher's Journal gave me the opportunity to capture intuitions,

perceptions, and questions the moment they sparkled in my mind during the observations since I was trying to lower the observation biases in order not to look for what I wanted to find but for what I was going to find in the classroom environment by paying attention to what was emerging at the time of my observation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967)



## Chapter 4

### Findings

#### The ESL 101 Case Analyses

##### Tom's case

*Making sense of academic writing.* The first paper written by Tom was *My First Day at the Part Time Job!* The draft from Tom had the track changes inserted by the instructor to help Tom refine his paper and re work some parts that were not very clear. Tom had to write his first essay on intercultural communication and made the choice of writing about his experience as an international student as a waiter in a Vietnamese restaurant in a restaurant in Toronto, Canada, and what issues or problems he had on his first job in the a foreign country.

The first comment from the instructor was “Good introduction, nicely narrowed!” What Tom wrote was “Luckily, I got a job in a Vietnamese Restaurant. I remember that my first day at the part time job convinced me that I needed to develop my communication skills and people skills” (p.1) The first part of the essay is a detailed discussion of what Tom experienced during his first day at work. The essay presents a good level of details since Tom tried to be as much descriptive as he could by following the prompt from the handout from the instructor on how to write a narrative in English. Tom wrote

I could not sleep the night before my first day at work. My head was running wild with thoughts, questions, and a whole lot of worrying. I just kept thinking about what could happen to me on the first day. The weather was cold, but I woke up earlier than usual. At that time, I was very happy; however, I was worried because this was a

chance for me to meet a lot of customers and speak to them. Moreover, I could save money for the University of Toronto (p.1).

The rubric for scoring Tom's paper instead, indicated that Tom's paper needed more details, that the paper was on an A level for comprehensibility, grammar, essay format and mechanics. My analysis of the paper points out that Tom's essay was not lacking details but the way the details were organized. I noticed that Tom was going back and forth in the essay on what he did and experienced on his first day at the Vietnamese Restaurant and what he did in the Restaurant at that time. One passage revealed this circular pattern in Tom's essay

My concern was that my English was not good enough for me to talk with native speakers. It was the first thing I thought of, but I was getting ahead of myself. I tried to tell myself that I had to relax and be more confident... Soon after, I started work, and my first customer made me so nervous. I can honestly say that I have never been more nervous that I was at that time. He spoke English so fast that I could not understand him (p.1-2).

Tom described his problem to speak English in the first part of the essay and later he returned on the same problem at the end of his essay by reiterating the same thing with more details from his experience as a waiter in the Vietnamese Restaurant in Toronto. I noticed in my analysis of Tom's first essay on intercultural communication that Tom's academic writing in English was emerging from Tom's efforts to acquire different stages of academic writing through a process of interaction with the instructor feedback. Tom was trying to address what the instructor was pointing out in the track changes and was making efforts to become conversant with a different system of communication and knowledge. Vygotsky

(1987) points out that the individual interact with their environment by the use of signs and by ascribing meaning to this signs.

Tom was attending the feedback from the instructor to connect to the system of communication and knowledge embedded in the comments. The track changes and the comments contained in them were cognitive and practical tools to connect Tom with the system of academic writing in English to use signs to communicate knowledge through meaning. Tom was not just using signs on a paper but he was ascribing important meanings to the system of academic writing in English as L2.

I went back to the textbook and the handout the instructor gave students on how to write a narrative and noticed that the textbook on page 55 did not explicitly present a definition of narrative while the handout from the instructor opened up with what narrative is and what students should pay attention to in the writing process: “Your narrative should describe in detail an experience you have had with adapting to a new culture. This experience can be recent, such as an event that occurred during your first few days in Albuquerque. Or it can be an experience from your past...” (p.1) The key aspect in the explanation of narrative in the instructor’s handout was an emphasis on the details students had to use in writing the essay. Once again, I noticed the discrepancy between what the instructor wanted students to focus on and what the rubric was missing; the part on the details in writing a narrative essay.

***The conference and the feedback in the narrative essay.*** I took note of the comments from the instructor in the paper and the rubric and waited for the day of the writing conference where Tom and the instructor were going to discuss the draft on the Intercultural Communication essay. I wanted to see if the comments from the instructor were going to support the ones in the paper and the rubric. The conference began with the

instructor and Tom sitting side by side with Tom putting his draft on the table with the rubric besides it. The instructor looked at the draft and the rubric to make sure that everything was in place to begin the conference and after that they began to discuss Tom's essay. I put my tape recorder on with a copy of Tom's draft in my hands to follow along during the conference time.

The transcriptions of the conference between the instructor and Tom demonstrated that the main concern of the instructor was the level of details in Tom's essay. One excerpt from the conference supports such a point

For instance, when you talk about your interaction with the customer in the restaurant you are working, you talk about your efforts to improve your communication in English and to have a better pronunciation. Elaborate a little bit more here. Give me more details...hum...try to be more descriptive so we can picture what you mean by that.

This comment made by the instructor during the conference was referring back to the communication problems between Tom and the customer in the Vietnamese Restaurant that I discussed earlier. I was tape-recording and reading the part that the instructor was pointing out during the conference with Tom and noticed that Tom's details were very rich instead

...He asked me: "What is PHO?" In fact, I knew PHO, but I had difficulties translating from Vietnamese to English. Even though I explained to him that PHO is soup with rice, noodle, meat etc. three times, still he did not understand me because my pronunciation was so bad. He was looking at me with confusion in his eyes. At this time my heart started beating faster and I asked myself: "Could I do this job?" I

really did not know what I could do to satisfy him, and I also was a afraid that my manager was watching me and would fire me (p.2).

This excerpt shows that Tom was applying what the handout recommended in writing a narrative essay with plenty of details on what his experience as a waiter in a Vietnamese Restaurant in Toronto turned out to be.

The instructor pointed out the issue on details and description during the conference by discussing another part of the paper where Tom needed to be more descriptive and reorganize the conclusion to have more coherence at the end of the narrative essay. Tom wrote in his conclusion of the narrative essay that he was happy to overcome this language block and was helped by another waiter at the time in how to explain “things to customers. I was extremely happy. My emotions went from rock bottom to the highest high.” (p.2)

The comments of the instructor during the conference on Tom’s conclusion were

I think it is a good one. Just tell me why your part time job at the restaurant was important to improve your English and your communication skills. Do not leave the conclusion on a general mode but try to summarize the main ideas of your essay and give your final thoughts on your experience and say if it was really useful or not. This is important for us to know if such an effort was worth it.

The conference ended up with the instructor asking Tom if he had more questions and by reminding Tom to be always descriptive. The instructor said

So, you need to be always descriptive and to provide the details that help us understand what you are writing, the purpose and the importance. When you use a narrative style even the conclusion must be supportive of that style.

I went back to see if the rubric was having any section on details and if such part had explanations on what details mean and if an explanation of the term “narrowed” was inserted in the rubric. I did not find any part in the rubric where the comments from the instructor inserted in the track changes on narrowing down the topic and “details” were laid out in the rubric. The discrepancy between the rubric, the feedback in the paper in the form of track changes made by the instructor and what the instructor said to Tom during the conference prompted me to ask Tom during the post conference interview if he understood what the instructor wanted him to do to write a better second draft.

Tom told me that he thought he knew what the instructor wanted and was going to rewrite the paper according to what the instructor said during the conference. I did not ask Tom if he knew what narrowing down the topic meant or what more details meant at the time. My questions during the post conference interview were more holistic to capture the overall perception of the conference from Tom. I wrote a thought that he came to my mind that afternoon in my Researcher’s Journal: “I want to make sure that my participants understand what the instructor said during the conferences and that they understand the handout given by the instructor during the ESL 101 Course. Need to ask Tom after the class next time I am there.”

My goal was to become aware and understand if the way the instructor was trying to support Tom in his acquisition and use of academic writing were producing positive outcomes. My first concern was to see if Tom was able to understand what the instructor was saying in relation to academic writing in English in the ESL 101 course. What I was trying to understand was if Tom was systematically becoming part of a system of knowledge and communication that had its rituals, its system of presenting knowledge and most of all to

become part of a discourse embedded in a language different from what is used in everyday interaction.

The important point here was Tom's ability to understand the feedback from the instructor or to the problem of clear feedback communication between the instructor and the student in academic literacy contexts (Burke and Deidre, 2010). Burke and Deidre (2010) also point out that the most difficult thing to do is to "get the message across" (p.94) since students should be "initiated into this communication to ensure that they 'conceptualize' feedback in the way intended by the tutor" (p.94). What I observed and what the data show is that Tom and the other participants in the study were not initiated to this communication and they participated in the L2 conferences with the understanding from the instructor that they knew what to do.

Tom pointed out in the post conference interview that the instructor was clear in what his expectations were for Tom to improve his paper. He said to me

I think that the instructor was very clear. I could ask questions and he answered them and I am sure that I will write a better final draft. I think that my questions were answered during the conference and if I have still some problems I can ask questions in the classroom or by e-mail.

Another important thing Tom said during the post interview was that he thought that 15 minutes were not enough to address all the points in the paper. He pointed out that he would hope that more time was allowed during the conference to discuss "things better and may be not being anxious on time." Anxiety and concern with time were two things that Tom would like to change in the conference format to delve into the paper in more details. Tom's was asking questions during the interview but overall it was the instructor that was leading

the conference by discussing the feedback in the draft and asking students if the feedback in the draft was clear and if students have any questions. In other words, the L2 conferences from Tom demonstrate that not much interaction of feedback communication was going on at the time of the study.

The comment made by Tom during the post interview opened up a different angle on academic writing that did not lie in the paper or the feedback only but was part of a broader system of learning and doing and constructing meaning specific to the ESL 101 course. Tom was pointing out that academic writing was not just an experience found in writing an academic paper, receives some feedback from the instructor and then turns the paper in and earns a grade. Tom's experience was more holistic and involved the cognitive and the emotional in the process of acquiring academic writing in English in the ESL 101 course.

Tom was aware that writing academically in English was a process where you connect with your writing on different levels of engagement. When Tom used the word "anxiety" and pointing out that he needed more time to discuss things better, he was looking at his experience within a situation of learning academic writing that was going beyond writing the paper and following the rhetorical and lexical conventions of English and was embedded in a *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky, 1934). Here, *perezhivanie* is used to look at the interaction between Tom and the ESL 101 course where the acquisition of academic writing took place. Tom was interacting with the environment, the material of the course and the instructor, to learn how to write and communicate by using the genre of academic writing as L2 (Hyland, 2004). Tom was acquiring academic writing in English by engaging in a dynamic process in which his cognitive ability to understand the course material, the instructors' explanations, and his interaction with the other peers was supportive of learning



how to write in English as L2 by looking at the qualitative changes during spring semester 2008.

After the class I observed after the first conference, I asked Tom if he knew what narrowing down meant and if he understood how to write his narrative paper with more details. Tom told me that to narrow down the topic meant that he had to “get to the point” and not to write too many things that were not related to the topic of the paper.” According to what Tom told me, narrowing down meant write something that it is to the point and as the instructor said to Tom and the other students in the classroom “write a good question that will help you write a good thesis statement at the beginning of your essay.” Tom told me that the instructor wanted more details or to write more on the different parts of the topic and Tom thought that he was getting to the point where he could improve this section of his narrative essay.

I noticed by attending the other two conferences and by reading the other two drafts from Tom on different writing assignments, *Mass media and Technology and Work*, that the same concerns emerged from the instructor and were addressed in the comments in the form of track changes in the drafts and during the conferences. Tom, according to what the comments in the papers pointed out and the conference feedback was still having problems with organization of ideas and details.

***The instructor’s voice.*** The draft on Mass Media and Technology with a topic on *MySpace* presented lengthy comments in the forms of track changes that were pointing out issues on the organization of ideas, details and verb tenses that were used by Tom to support his point of view on the use of *MySpace* among people today. Tom wrote

Nowadays, with the development of the Internet, the number of people using it has increased steadily, especially with the Internet Profile where people can chat, play games and shop online. More specifically, I wanted to focus on Myspace.com which people use the most as it's well known for friendship, dating, entertainment, and business. According to my research, more than 90 million people between the ages of 18 to 25 participate in Myspace .com.

The track changes with the comments from the instructor in this first paragraph of the paper on Mass Media and Technology were the following

Good introduction, but watch the verb tenses. When you are talking about you, use the past tense, but when talking about Myspace and the people who use it, use the present. Their habits haven't changed since you conducted the study.

The instructor was pointing out an issue that it was not present in Tom's first paper but emerged here affecting the narrative style of the paper. The second lengthy comment made by the instructor on Tom's paper was on the organization of ideas and details that Tom left out when writing the first draft. According to what the instructor pointed out in the comments Tom needed to reorganize the paper and be more specific when talking about the data. The instructor commented

Okay, I'm confused here. I kept thinking that I was reading your introduction, but this is your study. We need to reorganize. Separate each section and label them:

Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion. Then, in the Methods section, describe how you and your group collected your data. Who did you interview, what kind of questions did you ask? The result section needs to present the information you gathered, how many men/women? Ages? If you collected

information about nationality include that. Then give results about how much time each group spends on Myspace, their feelings about Myspace and these technology relationships vs. face-to-face relationships etc...

The instructor suggested Tom to reorganize his paper in its parts but also to make a better choice in the visual presentation of the paper. The suggestion on a better visual presentation of the paper was specifically related to the Result Section of the paper.

According to the comments of the instructor Tom and his group could use graphics to present the data in the research paper. The instructor wrote in his comments "Use the graphs that you and your group worked on for the PowerPoint on Monday. Then in the discussion section, give your opinion about Myspace. You might even speculate whether this sort of internet program would be popular in Vietnam."

The issue of organization of the different parts of the research paper affected the whole draft written by Tom and his group. Tom's draft presented the method section at the end of the research paper and the instructor pointed out that the Method section had to come much earlier in the paper. Tom wrote

The five students were Jason, Erin, Jesse, Justin and Jennifer. I asked them if they experienced Myspace. Jason, Erin, and Jesse answered that they had since they were high school students. Jennifer said she had never used Myspace and she did not like this kind of communication. Justin said he had never experienced this site before and in college he started using and loved it. When being asked about purposes of using Myspace, all of these surveyed said the site was good for everybody to maintain contact and friendship, except Jennifer. She told me she preferred to email and call people in order to keep in touch.

What the instructor said in the comments bring to the fore a problem with Tom's organization of the research paper

See this is your Methods section and it needs to come much earlier. You seem to have 2 pages of introduction and background. That needs to be cut way back. What are the major research questions your group wanted to investigate?

I read the comments very carefully and wrote down in my Researcher's Journal "Pay attention to what will be discussed in the conference. I want to see if Tom will have the opportunity to ask more questions and have more chances to interact...did not do this the first conference."

I took notice of the comments from the instructor in the track changes in Tom's draft and noticed that once again the instructor was pointing out the issue of details and organization. The rubric addressed the organization part as follows: (a) Introduction has intro, body, and conclusion. Introduction is appropriate and grab's the reader's attention. Introduction clearly states the topic. Introduction clearly states the purpose of thesis of the essay. Introduction embeds the thesis statement or purpose; (b) Body each is linked to and supports the topic stated in the introduction. Each paragraph is focused and has one topic/idea. Each paragraph has appropriate supporting examples; (c) Conclusion summarizes the ideas in the essay appropriately. Leaves the reader with a sense of completeness. Does not introduce new ideas and does not state the topic.

The day of the second conference where Tom was going to discuss the research paper on Myspace, I arrived there earlier as usual and prepared the tape recorder, I took out a copy of the draft and when Tom had his conference with the instructor, I sat between Tom and the

instructor, I activated the tape recorder and listen to what the instructor and Tom were going to discuss during the fifteen minutes of the conference.

Tom asked the first question on how to improve his paper on Myspace.com. The instructor was very specific in answering Tom's question by pointing out again problems with the organization of the paper

Yes, I do. I am confused. I keep thinking that I was reading about the introduction...I thought that this was an introduction. Ok? And as I read more I said "This is the all paper." Ok? You got some interesting information but what we need to do is to label the Introduction, the Results, and Conclusion.

I noticed that after this comment from the instructor Tom continued to ask questions that were specifically related to the parts of the paper with lengthy comments from the instructor with the goal to be able to improve his paper as much as he could before the final draft. Tom basically focused on what the instructor was pointing out at the beginning of the conference; the organization of the paper and how to write in a way that did not confuse the reader.

During this second conference between Tom and the instructor I noticed that Tom's ability to interact with the instructor was at a different level. The comment I wrote in my *Researcher's Journal* on Tom's low level of interaction with the instructor caught my attention during this conference since Tom's questions were more focused and Tom's ability to connect with the instructor and to discuss issues in his academic writing were qualitatively different. Gee (1997) points out actions can change patterns and cultural models and way to interact within an environment due to qualitative changes in individuals. Tom was showing this qualitative change in his ability to interact with the instructor, the way the instructor was

supporting Tom's acquisition and use of academic writing and Tom's ability to see the conference as an opportunity to become more connected with academic writing in English.

Another point that was emphasized by the instructor during the conference and was not part of the comments on the draft was brought up by Tom on how to present the data as a percentage or how to present the data more concisely and in a more specific fashion. The instructor suggested Tom to present the data "in a way that is consistent to the questions you asked in your paper and by presenting them according to the categories you created in your paper." Also, the instructor commented on how to use the percentage in a way that was contextual to the paper when the instructor pointed out that "The percentage should be a reliable representation of the results in your paper and must reflect the organization of data collection and analysis."

The question asked by Tom on *how to present the data* in the paper caught my attention during the conference because he showed me that the level and quality of Tom's questions during the conference was demonstrating that his cognitive ability to connect and interact with the system of academic writing was at a turning point. The turning point that I noticed during the conference between Tom and the instructor was that the question had a very specific focus due to Tom's ability to see what to improve in the paper and what questions to ask to reach this goal.

Tom's specific questions, from my perspective, point toward what Vygotsky (1934) sees as a different and more awareness (a qualitative change in the individual) of what to do to understand an experience presented in the same objective situation. The objective situation (same for all the participants in the study) was the conference with the instructor, the paper with comments, and the same allotted time, fifteen minutes. However, Tom was using the

same objective situation differently from the other participants at a cognitive level. Tom was experiencing the same objective situation by engaging in it with his level of understanding of academic writing in English, his level of understating of the instructor's comments on paper and during the conference and the ability to use this feedback to improve his paper.

Vygotsky (1934) clarify these qualitative changes by pointing out that the environment in which the individual is found keeps changing and the individual changes with the environment within a mutual process. Tom was changing in his ability to understand and use academic writing in English as L2 by interacting with the environment in which academic writing was taught, ESL 101 course, and by communicating his learning needs the environment was changing at the same time with the instructor, the SI tutor adapting their instruction to support Tom's acquisition of academic writing in English as L2.

Vygotsky (1934) further expands the importance of the environment in the qualitative changes of the individual when Vygotsky (1934) suggests that the environment expands and new relationships are formed between the individual and the people that surround him. Tom was looking at the expansion of the ESL 101 environment with different levels of difficulty in the academic genres used as writing assignments in the ESL 101 course and was constantly readapting his cognitive ability through questioning and working on his drafts to improve his writing abilities in English as L2 and going through qualitative changes as a second language writer in English in academic contexts.

The follow up interview was not recorded in my tape this time since Tom had to rush to his class. I jotted down what he told me on the fly saying "I think I got it but I need to go to CAPS this week to work more on the paper." The analysis of the paper on MySpace, the analysis of the conference with the instructor and the questions asked by Tom during the

conference indicate that this time more interaction through questioning gave more opportunities to Tom to be more participative in the conference and to gain more space and voice related to his academic writing.

***Making sense of the instructor's support.*** I was pondering why Tom had so many problems to write the research paper on MySpace in the area of organization and exposition of ideas. I went back to the handout given by the instructor to the students in ESL 101 the textbook and the rubric to see if some of the problems emerged in Tom's writing in his research paper were due to the directions in the handout, in the textbook or in the rubric since the instructor explained what to do in the classroom before students had to write the first draft. Tom told me during the classroom that he knew what to do when I was sitting in his group during the time allotted for writing the research paper in the Group Work and the Peer Review Session.

The handout distributed by the instructor to the student was a chapter on how to write research papers and represent data according to the conventions of the academia and research in general and the instructor gave students another handout that summarized what was explained at length in the chapter. The chapter had the title *Analyzing Field Research Data from Observation, Interviews, or Questionnaires*. The chapter the students had to read was divided into subsections that were explaining in detail how to analyzing data coming from the field during research. The chapter was 24 pages in length, contained tables to summarize the main points of the chapter, samples of data, and explanations on how to summarize and present the data in a formal research paper.

The handout was a summary of what the chapter contained. The instructor organized the handout as follows: (a) Due date; (b) Background where the instructor explained what to



do to write the research paper; (c) Examples of possible topics with a list of topics that ranged from how students use the web for school to the future of technology and food and technology; (d) Reporting Writing Essentials with the most important sections of the study, set up the study with the essential questions to ask when designing the study, the description of the study, the section with the results, and the conclusion; (e) Remember to consider the following when writing your report where the instructor was bulleting the most important things when writing academically from audience and purpose to essay format and mechanics; (f) Language Note and Writing Requirements were the last two sections of the handout where the recommendations on good use of academic language and format of the paper were presented in a list form.

The textbook on page 134 did not introduce the topic on Mass Media and Technology with details on how to write a research report. The chapter opened with the section Questions Raised in Chapter Three where the author was presenting five questions to keep in mind when writing the paper for Mass Media and Technology. The questions invited the reader to reflect on the role of the mass media and other forms of technology in our contemporary society and the influence they have on people's lives. The second subsection of the chapter was titled Brief Quotations where I found quotations from famous scholars writing about the influence of mass media in people's lives from Bruno Bettelheim to Mary Pipher, U.S. professor and author.

I scanned the chapter looking for more specific components on how to write a research paper on Mass Media and Technology but I did not find anything specific on how to write a formal research paper. Since the chapter introduced and explained figures of speech, the sections of chapter three were a detailed explanation on the definition, importance, and

use of figure of speech when writing academic papers. In a part of chapter three the author wrote

Authors often use figurative language, or figures of speech, to make their writing lively and memorable. Figures of speech are imaginative comparison between two dissimilar things. Such comparisons help readers visualize, identify with, and understand ideas by looking at familiar topics in new ways or at new topics in familiar ways (p.145)

The chapter of *Mass Media and Technology* presented sections like the one above but not a section on how to write a research paper. The part of the book where students could familiarize with writing a research paper was on page 102 and was titled *The Essential of Writing*. In this section of the book the author was presenting the basics for writing an essay: (a) the structure of an essay; (b) the writing process; (c) writing with sources. I read the section and I found out that this part of the book was complementary to the chapter and the handout given by the instructor on writing research papers in academic contexts since the section was discussing academic writing in its different genres and by using visual support (The structure of an essay represented as an inverted triangle) to help students visualize what an essay in English looked like and what steps to follow to write one.

The rubric once again was specific in pointing out the importance of writing academically according to the five parts of an essay in English-Content, Organization, Comprehensibility, Grammar, and Format and Mechanics-but did not explain how to present details in the essay according to a particular convention. The same issue that emerged during Tom's first essay on intercultural communication, resurfaced here since I did not see any

addendum to the rubric to insert more specific explanations on how to present and organize details in the essay.

I wrote down in my Research Journal that I was going to ask the SI and Tom (Supplemental Instructor) from CAPS (Center for Academic Program Support) at the University of New Mexico why Tom had experienced problems to write his research paper (I knew that Tom was going to discuss the issues surfaced during the conference in the research paper the week before my observations with the SI instructor in CAPS). After my observation in the ESL 101 class I talked to the SI instructor first and Tom later. The SI instructor told me that not only Tom but other international students in the course were experiencing the same problems in the organization of the different sections of the research paper, the language to use in the paper as well as the presentation and organization of details in the paper. The SI instructor pointed out that this specific type of paper seemed to be much harder for the students in the ESL 101 course and Tom and other students from the course had already asked for an appointment to revise the paper in CAPS.

The SI instructor said that Tom still had problems to understand how to put ideas in the appropriate section of the paper and often Tom did not understand why one set of information had to go in one specific part of the paper. I asked Tom the same questions at the end of the class and he told me that he had all the data to write the research paper but still was making mistakes how to organize and present the data. The SI instructor was working with Tom on organization by supporting Tom in his efforts to improve his paper before the due date. In particular, Tom told me that the amount and organization of details was still a problem. He believed that this was due to the structure of the essay in English and that often

times he was putting details in the wrong part of the paper thinking that he needed more descriptive in that part and not in other.

This was an interesting point raised by Tom during our conversation after the class. I noticed that Tom was aware what to do but still struggling with academic writing in English on how to organize and present his ideas in a formal research paper. Moreover, I noticed that the SI pointed out that this was a general problem for the other students in the classroom even though I know from my observations that the instructor and the SI tutor were working with the students in the ESL 101 course to solve this problem.

What was interesting to me at the time and what it is still a question while I am writing the data analysis for this study is why after the use of good material, detailed explanations on how to organize the data in the formal Research Paper and the help of the instructor and the SI tutor, Tom improved but not as much as he was expecting since he was aware on what to do. The question I still have is why this part of academic writing, organization of data in a formal Research Paper, the same objective situation, became a general problem for the students in the ESL 101 course, with the due differences among the students in the course, even with a good system of support from the instructor and the SI tutor.

My question connected to my theoretical framework has to do with on how the explanation or the meaning communicated by the instructor and the SI tutor in the ESL 101 course percolated down to Tom and was interpreted by my participant. Tom said that he knew what to do and that what the instructor said was clear. However, when it came to apply what the instructor said, Tom seemed to show disconnect between what he thought it was clear and what he really did in his Research Paper. Mahn (2008) points out that meaning is a

two sided-process. Mahn (2008) claims we find the individual speaker [writer] that transforms meaning qualitatively by interacting with a situation in the environment. Tom was transforming meaning in the environment but this qualitative transformation was probably in its infancy at the time of the study showing that Tom was aware at a cognitive level but the translation of such awareness into a better writing process was still difficult.

I circled back to Tom's research paper on *Mass Media and Technology* and went through all the comments inserted in the track changes by the instructor to see if what Tom said was supported by the data I collected. The comments from the instructor supported what Tom was pointing out during our conversation after class. The instructor pointed out that he was confused and did not know which part of the paper Tom was writing and the details were spread out instead of being well organized according to the sections of the research paper. In turn, Tom was aware of this problem and was receiving support from CAPS, the SI instructor, to correct this issue in his research paper.

I asked Tom if the handout and the chapter the instructor gave the students on how to write research papers and the book were helpful in revising and improving the paper. He told me that he preferred to go to the SI instructor instead of just relying on the handout, the chapter from the instructor and the book since he found CAPS writing studio very supportive to improve his academic writing. The handout, the chapter from the instructor on how to write a research paper, and the textbook were used by Tom in conjunction with the support from the SI in CAPS in Tom's efforts to improve his academic writing in the ESL 101 course.

***Tom's personal voice and positionality.*** Tom's writing in the Blue Book or Reading Journal was based on the writings from the different sections of the textbook as laid out in

the syllabus of the ESL 101 course. In the Reading Journal the instructor was asking students to explore and experiment with a different type of writing. What the instructor was asking the ESL students in the classroom was to realize the importance of writing in helping students in the ESL 101 course on “how writing can help you to clarify what others have said and to discover new ideas and perspectives.” Students had to choose one reading from each of the sequences of readings as laid out in the syllabus and explore the ideas of the writer by putting their personal voice in the writing process to compare contrast what the author said and what the students thought about the topic presented by the author in the textbook.

For the intercultural communication sequence in the ESL 101 course, Tom chose to write on a piece written by Margaret K. (Omar) Nydell on Friends and Strangers an essay that discusses differences between Arab and Western cultures, North American in particular on the concepts of friendship. The author according to the textbook is “A cross-cultural trainer and teacher of Arabic who has lived in many Arab countries, written several books on the Arabic language, and lectured extensively on Arab Culture.” (p.40)

Tom’s began his analysis of writing by summarizing the main theme of the essay by pointing out what the author was emphasizing in her work. Tom wrote

In the article “Friends and Strangers,” Margaret K. Nydell points out the differences between the American culture and the Arab culture in term of friendship. She claims the relations in Arab culture are very personalizing while Americans tend to think friends as someone whose company they enjoy. Comparing to American and Arab culture where I grew up, there is many different ways to demonstrate friendship (p.1).

Tom made his personal connection between the essay and his experience to prepare the reader to understand why this essay was important to him. The second paragraph presents

a very detailed analysis on what Tom's meaning and importance of friendship is to him as a Vietnamese and international student. Tom raised a very interesting point in this part of the Reading Journal by using his voice to present a strong positionality on friendship from an intercultural point of view. Tom wrote

First of all, in order to make friends, it is very normal for people in my country to ask a lot of personal questions such as "How old are you?" What do you do? Where do you live? And so on. From those kinds of questions, a lot of my American friends asked me why we do it. From my own experience, I believe that it is very good thing to do because people can get more information about the person who is going to be their friend...Therefore, I was very shocked when I tried to make friends with people [in the United States]. They were all mad at me because I asked too many questions when I first met them (p.1).

Tom's ability to use writing to express his own opinion and to use writing to improve his English writing skills and discover how writing could help Tom to clarify what other have said and to discover new ideas and perspectives was emerging in Tom's Reading Journal from the excerpt presented above. Tom was able to articulate his positionality as a writer when engaging with the essay on friendship. In other words, Tom was demonstrating a better control of academic English as L2 in the Reading Journal.

Another important aspect emerging from this excerpt on Tom's writing in his Reading Journal was Tom's ability to look at an experience and relate to it through the prism of the writer's experience and Tom's personal experience (Vygotsky, 1934). I noticed that Tom was not just responding to the reading in the textbook on *Friends and Strangers* by merely summarizing what the author of the article was saying but Tom was inserting his

personal voices and was creating his prism from where we could make sense of a similar experience and present such experience as important to the reader of his Reading Journal. This ability Tom demonstrated in his Reading Journal is what Bakhtin and Medvedev (1978) define as the ability of language to become a vehicle of social, cultural, and personal bonding between the individual writer and his/her community in which writing is used. Tom was primarily writing for his instructor but also for all the other international students that in different degrees experienced a similar situation.

Vygotsky (1987) points out that speech [writing] has two important functions in the individual: (a) the ability to communicate socially; (b) the ability to generalize using language. Vygotsky (1987) defines this ability to communicate socially and to generalize by using language *znachenie slova* or the unity of thinking and speech or “a unity of generalization and social interaction, a unity of thinking and communication” (p.49). Tom was using academic writing in English as L2 in his Reading Journal to not only self-reflect but also and more importantly to communicate socially in the environment of the ESL 101 course by generalizing his experience through academic writing in English. Tom was using language, written language, to become part of a discourse community in which language was the social, cultural, and emotional bond to become part of the parlor in the ESL 101 course (Burke, 1973).

Tom’s ability to use English as a second language in writing the Reading Journal for the ESL 101 course was demonstrated by Tom’s ability to engage with different topics during the semester that he had to discuss in his Reading Journal. When Tom wrote and discussed the essay written by Yaping Tang on *Polite but Thirsty* an essay where culture shock is discussed by a Chinese native and bilingual teacher in the United States, Tom was



able to use his voice to find his positionality in commenting what culture shock meant for him by writing

First of all, English was the first thing that bothered me. I was very embarrassed of my speaking in the first day of school. I could not believe that the English I learned back home did not apply here [the United States] because of the different pronunciation. I tried to talk a lot but no one understood me at all. I was very disappointed and asked myself “Should I come back home?” or “Should I continue to study?” In fact, it was very hard for me to come back home because my parents had spent a lot of money to send me here [the United States].

Tom was positioning his voice in relation to what the author of the essay on *Polite but Thirsty* was writing in her essay. Yaping, the author of the essay, was recalling a similar experience the writer defined as inadequacy in her essay. Yaping wrote

Right after their arrival, however, these students [international students] find themselves exposed to novel, unfamiliar environments. They feel vulnerable during their first year or two. For these newcomers, life is not easy. When people suddenly find themselves in a different culture, their first and dominant experience is perhaps the feeling of inadequacy. It is not only the basic inadequacy of not knowing English fluently but also the ignorance of what is appropriate and what is not, be it in school, on the bus, in restaurants, at parties, or in stores. Newcomers, not knowing the codes of the new culture, constantly fear seeming ridiculous (Textbook, p.36).

Tom was aligning his experience with the one described in the essay but with a turn on language since it does seem that Tom was experiencing a feeling of embarrassment and inadequacy when using English as a second language in the U.S. Tom’s ability to write with

a personal voice and to connect in depth with the readings used to write in his Reading Journal is shown in the other writings contained in the Reading Journal. From the analysis of friendship to culture shock and issues on mass media and communication Tom was able to maintain the same level of engagement and personal voice as demonstrated by the samples discussed here.

I was interested in understanding why there was a difference in the quality of writing in the different writing assignments or genres required in the ESL 101 course. I reanalyzed the interviews and the final reflection paper written by Tom to see if from their analysis I could become aware and understand some of the issues Tom was experiencing in writing academically in English as a second language. Tom's interviews and reflection paper revealed interesting aspects on Tom's development as an academic writer in L2.

According to what Tom said during the first interview, he was experiencing problems with new words in the different writing assignments for the ESL 101 course. He said

I know what I want to write but I need to use the dictionary to find the right word to use in English. It is not difficult but takes time for me to write since I am not a native speaker of English. I also think that if you have more vocabulary in English the other courses are not so difficult...If you know more words and what they mean, you can easily write or pass a test.

The main issue for Tom during our first interview was the level of vocabulary he had at the beginning of the semester and the way he was coping with vocabulary problems and the use of the dictionary. I analyzed the second interview carried out at the end of the spring semester 2008 and I found that Tom seemed to have overcome the vocabulary problem by using the support at the University of New Mexico in the form of writing tutors in CAPS and

the instructor from the ESL 101 course. What emerged during this second interview was a concern Tom had with the format of the paper, a concern that was evident in Tom's narrative essay and research paper discussed in this section of the data analysis and the support he needed to overcome this issue. Tom said

I had problems to understand the format...hum...how to put ideas in order. My first draft was really terrible! [Talking about the research paper] But the second draft was really good. It was not the grammar so much but how to put in order my ideas and to write a good report with good details.

Tom also pointed out that the support from his instructor and the tutors (SI tutors from CAPS) was very helpful to improve his academic writing and to become more proficient in writing different kinds of paper and for different classes. Tom pointed out

I think that you should learn these strategies [writing strategies] from your instructors and then the tutors can help you improve these strategies. I think that ESL 101 could give you a good knowledge of what to do as a student in an American University and then you can become a better student because you know what to do when you read write and study for an exam.

Tom was discussing important points related to his growth as an international student and as a second language writer. Also, Tom was pointing out that to become a better student you had to be self-reliant and put effort in what you are doing as an international student and second language writer. I wanted to verify if what Tom said in this last interview was corroborated by the Reflection Paper Tom wrote for his Portfolio Assignment in the ESL 101 course.

Tom claimed in his Reflection Paper that he put “a large amount of effort in this course [ESL 101] and I am very thankful for my instructor.” (p.1) Most importantly, Tom was very specific in emphasizing the areas of improvement during the ESL 101 course. Tom lay out and discussed four areas in which he saw progress in his academic writing: (a) Revision; (b) writing decision; (c) reading and analysis; (d) clarity and surface features.

From the interviews to the final Reflection Paper, Tom showed that his engagement with the ESL 101 course showed a deep level of engagement with the writing assignment, the instruction in the classroom, his interaction with the other students and the SI tutor. What I noticed by analyzing the data on Tom’s case is that Tom was aware of the boundaries within which he was moving at the time of the study. In particular, when Tom pointed out the areas in which he saw progress and how the instructor from the course and the SI tutor helped him to become a better writer in English. The data coming from Tom’s interviews and final Reflection Paper suggest that Tom’s awareness of his positionality as second language writer and ESL 101 student were going through a continuous transformation by using academic conventions embedded in the English language.

The ability to dialogue between his perception of the progress Tom’s made and what the influence of environment-instructor, SI tutor, and the other students in the classroom-was on Tom’s acquisition of academic writing was is embedded in what Bakhtin (1984) calls the ability to create a dialogue between the individual and the community in which the individual is interacting. Tom’s was using the same academic conventions in writing but with the ability to use these conventions to have a voice and to position his academic “I” in a different way from the other participants in the study and the other students in the ESL 101 course. It was a Vygotsky (1934) and Mahn (2008) suggest the ability of the individual to go through

qualitative changes by interacting with the environment and experiencing it on a personal or subjective level of understanding of that experience.

The concept of *perezhivanie* as discussed by Vygotsky (1934) in *the problem of the environment* is Tom's lived experience in the ESL 101 course during spring semester 2008. Tom's lived experience was what Vygotsky (1934) define as the ability of the individual to interpret, perceive and experience the same objective situation in different ways from other individuals in the same objective situation. Tom in his Reflection Paper was using academic writing in English as L2 to interpret, perceive, and make sense of the same objective situation, ESL 101 course, differently from the other participants in the study. Tom was cognitively and emotionally interpreting and perceiving what the ESL 101 course meant to him as a second language writer and an international student by using the genre of the reflection paper as a tool to output his perception and understanding of the ESL 101 course.

Tom pointed out in the revision part of his Reflection Paper that "suggestions from teachers and friends gave me the opportunity to know what other people think of my ideas, so I could look critically at what I have written from the reader's point of view." Also, Tom was aware that "The revision process not only gave me an opportunity to revise what I had written but it also helped me to create stronger arguments and more vivid examples to support my ideas." In turn, Tom was demonstrating an awareness of what to do to improve his academic writing.

In the Writing Decision part of Tom's Reflection Paper Tom self-reflected on the importance of being more specific in organizing the discussion of his central ideas in the papers to make the papers stronger. Tom reported that feedback from the instructor during the writing conference; the writing group and peer review were very important parts of his

development as academic writer in a second language. Tom's interaction with his peers in the ESL 101 course, the communication with the instructor, and his commitment to work hard supported his academic writing development in a second language.

In the Reading and Analysis part Tom said

I looked deeper in the writing styles of these articles [the articles read for the Reading Journal] to see how they may be applied in my papers. In addition, I was able to discuss a lot of articles with my classmates. For example, when we were discussing the article "The New American Dreamers," most of the students in the class agreed that people should have dreams and aspirations about their future since they are young, but some did not agree because they think people cannot afford to make their dreams come true.

Tom believed that this opportunity to discuss and systematically interact with other students during the writing process was important because it gave Tom the opportunity to "feel more comfortable to read and understand English...Furthermore, I found that is very helpful to read examples of the assignments that we were supposed to read." Tom's analysis of this part of his experience in the ESL 101 course pointed out what kind of interaction Tom had with his peers and instructor and how such interaction supported Tom's development of academic writing in English as a second language.

In the Clarity and Surface Features Tom discussed the importance of CAPS as systematic system of support in academic writing at the University of New Mexico to help him with the mechanics of academic writing in English and organization of ideas. Tom wrote that "My writing skills have improved greatly since I have been going to CAPS. People there helped me a lot on my papers, especially with punctuation and grammar skills."

Tom concluded his Reflection Paper by emphasizing how important was the ESL 101 course for his academic writing in a second language

After all, I can say my time in English 101 has been immensely rewarding and valuable to me. I gained so much confidence in my writing skills. I feel like I have learned a higher level of writing through this class [ESL 101 course]. Most of my essays have become successful. Again, I would like to thank Mr. [the instructor] and tutors in CAPS for their profound knowledge. I hope and believe that with my current writing skills, I will succeed in my future academic writing courses.

This paragraph is the conclusion of Tom's Reflective Paper for the ESL 101 course where Tom pointed out the positive experience he had with the ESL 101 course and the hope that the ESL 101 course could support Tom's future academic writing courses. According to what Tom wrote in his Reflection Paper the overall experience in the ESL 101 course was positive and the support from the University of New Mexico through CAPS helped Tom to become a better and more confident writer in English as a second language in academic contexts.

The acquisition and use of academic writing in Tom's case presents the following trajectory within the key theoretical concepts used in this study. *Perezhivanie* or the ability of Tom to make sense of the lived experience in the ESL 101 course can be found in Tom's ability to relate to the course material, the interaction with the instructor and the other peers in the classroom in a way that was supportive of Tom's acquisition of academic writing in English as L2. *Perezhivanie* can be described in Tom's case as Tom's ability to make sense of his frustrations when confused on what to do and asking questions to clarify doubts Tom

had on how to use academic writing in English as L2. Systematic interaction with the environment was Tom's perezhivanie for this study.

### **Paola's case**

***Making sense of academic writing.*** Paola's first essay on intercultural communication described her experience coming to Albuquerque and the issues in dealing with a new culture and especially a new language. Paola wrote in her narrative essay on intercultural communication that

The classes began on a cold day and the University The was full of students and a nervousness started to come in my body, you know the language and the idioms of Americans are difficult to me because I know English but not too much to won't get in travel. Problems starts when I went to Santa Fe with the other exchange students and I wanted to talk to some of them but sometimes they couldn't understand me and when that happen I started being nervous, and then I don't want to talk to anyone no more.

The instructor's comments in the track changes were focused on details and organization of the paragraph Paola wrote for her narrative essay. The instructor commented Good introduction. Can you be more descriptive? When did you come from? What were you first impression of UNM, the buildings, the people, the language? Can you talk more going to Santa Fe and your nervousness? Who did you go to Santa Fe with? What was your purpose of the trip? How did you get to Santa Fe?

The instructor pointed out that the level of details was not enough to help the reader understand Paola's experience in New Mexico and University of New Mexico (UNM) in



particular. This was supported by other comments in the track changes in Paola's draft. In one of the track changes the instructor wrote

These are good ideas and I want to hear more about them. The ideas though seem disorganized. First you talk about going to class, and then you switch to Santa Fe and wanting to speak English. The readers get lost in your flow of ideas.

I looked at the rubric and Paola had a C in the section of the rubric on organization but as noticed before the rubric did not have any section on details and how to organize them. Also, in the rubric the instructor marked problems with the grammar and essay format and comprehensibility. I circled back to the narrative essay on intercultural communication to see where the instructor pointed out these problems in the track changes and found one comment at the end of the draft in the section on Paola's conclusion. Paola wrote in her conclusion of the narrative essay that

If you are an exchange student, you should watch every single moment at everywhere because you're going to see a light coming to teach you something new. Even you know all the English words, the thing that is pretty important is that you are here doing your best as well you can and not everyone has this opportunity to be here and try to be a better person.

The comment of the instructor in the track changes were pointing out the same issues found in the rubric by explaining what Paola had to do to improve his draft. The instructor wrote

Good conclusion. What is your topic in this paragraph? Remember in English, we want to know the topic at the beginning of the essay. Here you mention learning English and being an exchange student. These are necessary ideas that, in English,

need to come in the introduction. Grammar: Punctuation and using negatives (not, nothing, anything) please see [SI Instructor] she can help you with these. Please, add more details about your trip to Santa Fe and your experiences communicating with your friends.

My attention on these last comments was caught on the instructor's comments "see the SI Instructor" and at the end of the classroom I saw Paola talking to the SI instructor. I approached them and listened to what they said. Paola was asking the SI instructor when she could sit down in CAPS and go through the organization of the essay and the grammar. The SI instructor said "Stop by CAPS and make an appointment." After Paola finished talking to the SI instructor I asked her if she knew what to do to begin to work on the revision of the draft. Paola told me that she was going to wait to be with the SI instructor since she wanted to make sure to address the instructor's points in details.

The data from Paola's indicate that a pattern on the acquisition of academic writing is in place. Tom experienced problems with organizations and grammar (the verb tense) in dealing with academic writing in different genres (from the intercultural communication essay to the formal Research Paper) and Paola's data point toward the same issue. I reflected upon this pattern that was emerging from Tom's and Paola's data and pondered about the level of English language proficiency Paola had at the time of the study and the ability to understand what to do to improve her academic writing in the ESL 101 course.

I carefully reread the interview to triangulate what emerged during the conferences, my classroom observations and informal conversations with the instructor and the SI leader to see if language could be an issue or if other environmental factors played a major role in Paola's issues with academic writing. In one part of the first interview, I noticed that Paola

was pointing out problems with following the rules for academic writing and her problems to use writing in the ESL 101 course. Moreover, Paola told me that she was struggling with writing and reading because Spanish was a different language from English and she had to learn how to write in English and forget Spanish.

This part of the interview brought to the fore the importance to acquire a new system of meaning in another language from the rhetorical conventions to the ability to understand the pragmatic of the language (Mahn, 2008). My interest in this part of the interview with Paola was that language was pivotal in supporting Paola in her acquisition and use of academic writing in the ESL 101 course and to make meaning of what it meant to write academically as a second language writer. As Vygotsky (1987) in Mahn (2008) contends “The sense of a word is never complete and that sense as the aggregate of all the psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as the result of that word” (pp. 275-276).

Paola was in the process of building a new system of meaning in English as L2 by relying on her first language, Spanish, as a support system during this transition process. Paola was trying to make sense of a different system of knowledge and communication where different conventions apply. Paola’s cognitive and emotional system was supporting Paola’s efforts to understand and use academic writing in English as L2 by consciously interacting with the writing requirements of ESL 101 course. Mahn (2008) suggests that Paola was developing her system of meaning to understand and use academic writing in English as L2 by using her thinking processes and language processes. In turn, Paola was using language and academic writing in particular to understand how to become part of the academic knowledge and discourses in the ESL 101 course.

As the data suggest, Paola was in the process of acquiring a new language, a new system of communication and its requirements as the data suggest. What Paola was experiencing was that her system of meaning in Spanish, which points towards different genres of writing in the ESL 101 course as she pointed out during the interview, was different from the academic writing requirements in English and at the time of the study she was learning how to deal with this new way of conveying meaning into language. Academic writing as a system of communication and knowledge was asking Paola to understand a new Parlor a new way of becoming part of a new discourse community in English (Burke, 1973).

Paola described her acquisition of academic writing in English as L2 as struggling with writing and reading because of Spanish different from English. The use of the word *struggling* points towards the emotional experience (perezhivanie) Paola was going through in the acquisition of academic writing as L2 at the time of the study. Paola was struggling with words and organization of ideas and expressed her frustration during our interviews.

Paola's ability to use academic writing in English as L2 was different from Tom's same objective experience. While Tom was a more confident learner demonstrated by his ability to ask more focused questions and work better in group, Paola did not ask questions in class for clarification or during the L2 conferences even though the interviews and our informal conversations showed frustration and issues in reading and writing in English as L2 in the ESL 101 course.

The concept of perezhivanie applied to Paola's case study demonstrates that the same objective situation of learning was internalized differently by Paola if compared to Tom's case. This was important for the study to understand how academic writing in English as L2

was a process that presented different degree or acquisition and use in the same learning environment of the ESL 101 course.

*The conferences and the feedback in the narrative.* I wrote in my Researcher's Journal "I want to wait until the day of the conference and see what the instructor will say on Paola's essay on intercultural communication." The day of the conference I followed my rituals as usual. I arrived there earlier, I prepared my tape recorder and the draft of the narrative essay with the track changes and when the Paola's time was on I sat between the instructor and Paola and activated my tape recorder and quietly listened to what the instructor and Paola had to say on the essay on intercultural communication. The instructor opened with the following comments

I think that overall you got a great story... "I came to Albuquerque one month ago"...hum...so, I think you need to be more descriptive, ok? Where did you come from, what was the first impression of UNM, the buildings, the people, so the more background so we can begin to kind of seeing this experience through your eyes, ok?

Paola did not say much. She said "Ok." The instructor continued to talk about the level of description in the essay and the importance of organizing the details in the essay on intercultural communication. The conference focused on the same issues pointed out by the instructor in the track changes in Paola's draft. The instructor expanded what he wrote in the track changes with Paola following along without saying much during the conference as shown in the transcripts. I did not notice a difference between what commented in the track changes and what the instructor said during the conference with Paola. Comments on details, organization of ideas in the essay, and grammar were what it was discussed during this conference.

At the end of the conference I carried out my post conference interview with Paola and asked her if she was clear on what to do to improve her essay. Paola said

I did not understand what to do just at the beginning of the conference because I was a little bit nervous but I believe that I will be able to write a good final draft. I write differently in my language, Spanish, because we do not start with a narrow topic but we narrow down the topic later in the paper. I have to be careful when I rewrite the introduction.

Paola did not mention in the post conference interview if she went to CAPS and worked on her narrative essay on intercultural communication with the SI instructor. I jotted down in my Researcher's Journal "Will ask if she met the SI instructor." I wanted to verify if Paola was working with the SI instructor and CAPS writing studio as she told me during our after class conversation before the conference with the instructor.

The day I observed the ESL 101 Course I waited until the end of the class and then I asked Paola if she sat down with the SI instructor to go over the first draft of the essay on intercultural communication. Paola told me that she went to the CAPS writing studio to work on her draft on the narrative essay on intercultural communication and found the support from the SI instructor very helpful even though she had to work hard on her grammar and organization of ideas as she pointed out during the post conference on her narrative essay on intercultural communication.

*The instructor's voice.* I asked the instructor of the ESL 101 Course if Paola was getting better at writing her essay. The instructor said that she was not bad but she had more or less the same problems that other international students have when they write academic essays in English. The instructor noticed a pattern in the difficulty organizing the ideas in the

essay, the level of details, and for some of the grammar and mechanics. He pointed out that these issues are common in international students even though each international student experience them at a different level depending on their level of English.

Paola pointed out a problem in the rhetorical organization of the essay that emerged during our interview as well as Paola's problems with narrowing down the topic, organizing her ideas according to the academic writing requirements in English and levels of details and grammar. From what Paola said and from what the SI tutor and the instructor pointed out at the time of the study, Paola was entering a new system of communication and knowledge (academic writing in English) and was trying to understand what to do to improve her academic writing. Paola was experiencing the same objective situation as Tom did but her problems with academic writing and her experience from the data suggest that Paola was at a different level of understanding and use of academic writing.

***Making sense of the instructor's support.*** I continued to delve into Paola's academic writing going over her formal Research Paper as part of her collaborative or group work as the second writing requirement for the ESL 101 Course. I focused on what emerged from the conference and the track changes to understand if the same issues were emerging in this second writing assignment or if some of them were not part of Paola's academic writing problems at that point of the semester. The instructor comments during the conference on the Research Paper *The Influence of Laptops in Students' Life* were very positive

You and your group have done an excellent job in being very specific in analyzing and explaining the data in your paper. Good job! The only thing, and this is a minor thing would be the "when" you conducted the interview. Ok? You can say "We conducted the interviews, you know, between March the 3rd and March 10th Ok? Or

you can be more general and say “In the spring 2008 we conducted the research.” We need time frame for your study. Ok?

While I was tape recording the conference and listening to what the instructor had to say on Paola’s group work on the research paper, I jotted down a question in my Researcher’s Journal “Ask Paola if group work helped her to write a better paper...interesting point!” I waited until the end of the conference and asked Paola just one question for my post conference interview as I wrote in my Researcher’s Journal during Paola’s conference with the instructor.

Paola told me that she was better at writing this research paper because one of the international students in the group was a good writer and helped the other members of the group with revision of the draft. Also, she said that she was reading the handout form the instructors on how to write a researcher paper and asked the SI instructor questions if she did not understand something during the writing of the draft on the research paper. I wrote something in my Researcher’s Journal on “What is the real improvement then? Hard to say but group work seems to be helpful for Paola and her academic writing.”

The process of *znachenie slova* (Vygotsky, 1987) was paramount to elucidate my thoughts in the Researcher’s Journal and assess Paola’s acquisition of academic writing in the ESL 101 course. Vygotsky (1987) as cited in Mahn (2008) contends that *znachenie slova* helps to understand the process the individual goes through when interacting with the environment by the use of signs and by ascribing meaning to the signs. As Vygotsky (1987) in Mahn (2008) points out *znachenie slova* is important “to communicate an experience of some other content of consciousness to another person, it must be related to a class or group of phenomena.



Paola was in a continuous process of communicating her experience of acquiring academic writing in the ESL 101 course by interacting with the instructor, the SI tutor and her peers. She was trying to according to the data to make generalizations and to relate to a class or group of phenomena in the form of writing assignments, group work, and the interaction in the classroom to learn how to write academically better and better in the course of the semester.

***Paola's personal voice and positionality.*** I analyzed Paola's Reading Journals for the ESL 101 Course and noticed that Paola was having a different level of engagement with academic writing in this part of the course. Paola's first writing on the Reading Journal was on the reading from the textbook *A Coward*. The author of the reading *A Coward* was published in 1933 by the Indian author Premchand and talks about a particular type of intercultural variation in India, the caste system and its effects on people's lives. Premchand opens up his essay by writing

The boy's name was Keshav, the girl's Prema. They went to the same college and they were in the same class. Keshav believed in new ways and was opposed to the old caste customs. Prema adhered to the old order and fully accepted the traditions. But all the same there was a strong attachment between them and the whole college was aware of it. Although he was a Brahman, Keshav regarded marriage with this Banya (Hindu subcaste consisting of merchants and traders) girl as the culmination of his life. He didn't care a straw about his father and mother. Caste traditions he considered a fraud. If anything embodied the truth for him, was Prema. But for Prema it was impossible to take one step in opposition to the dictates of caste and family (p.44-45).

Paola began her writing on this piece of narrative in the textbook by opening up with a question that shows a very in depth engagement with the reading in the textbook. Paola wrote

What is the most important thing in this life to keep living happiness? Do you have to have love in your life, which of these are important to you? When you start to think on what is more important to you to have a better life or to live happiness, those words (love and money) cause controversy because it depends of what the person who is giving the opinion of this argument.

Even though Paola was showing problems with grammar and mechanics from this excerpt taken from Paola's Reading Journal, Paola's ability to use academic writing in her Reading Journal was growing and was showing a high level of critical thinking and an in depth understating of the content on the reading *A Coward*. I made a comment in my Researcher's Journal "Ask Paola if this type of academic writing is easier for her to use."

I asked Paola this question after my observation of the ESL 101 Course. Paola told me that the Reading Journal was good for her because she could develop her ideas in a way that the other formal papers could not. She said that the Reading Journal was good to understand the readings for the course and use writing to become a better writer in English. I jotted down this informal conversation in my Researcher's Journal and wrote "Seems that this writing in the Journal is working for Paola." The interviews further demonstrated what I noticed during the conferences, the classroom observations, the informal talking with the instructor and the SI on Paola's issues in learning and using academic writing.

During my first interview with the participants, Paola pointed out that she was aware of her problems with the organization of the paper and the grammar when writing in English. She said

Yes, I think that rules means that you need to follow a certain organization of the paper. For example, I know that I have to write my thesis statement at the beginning of the paper and not at the end. I know that I need write not too many long sentences and express my ideas in a simple way without writing too much or sentences that are too long. I think that I am getting better. I am getting better at using grammar in English.

During this first interview Paola said that she was using the support from CAPS and the SI instructor in particular because she found this support very helpful in becoming a better writer in English. Paola commented

I need to improve in all areas of writing. My SI tutor is good because she knows what to do. I ask my ESL 101 instructor too but I can also go to writing tutors here at the university and I can work on my writing. It is helpful because I know what to do and where to study hard to improve my writing...I go to the SI tutor and she is very helpful to give me good suggestions on the use of the words in different contexts. Our ESL 101 instructor works closely with the SI tutor because she [the SI tutor] is in the class and so she knows what we need to do and she is very helpful when we are working on our written assignments so we know that we are doing a good job.

Paola was pointing out an important part of her growth as academic writer in English. Paola was emphasizing the importance of the coordination between the ESL 101 instructor and the SI tutor from CAPS in supporting her academic writing in English in the ESL 101

Course. Paola was highlighting the importance of synergic work between the ESL 101 instructor and the SI tutor to have a system of support for international students in their efforts to learn and use academic writing in English.

What Paola said during this interview brought me back to ponder on the main questions of this study and to develop a more in depth engagement with the data to understand Paola's acquisition with academic writing in English in the ESL 101 course. In particular, I focused my attention on the first question "What components do the participants focus in the data?" with components meaning what was important for Paola in her process of acquisition of academic writing. I noticed that writing was embedded in system of relationships in the ESL 101 course that went beyond the act of writing papers for the course.

When Paola was pointing out during the interviews and our conversations on how helpful the peer group work, the SI tutor, and the instructor were in her acquisition of academic writing, I narrow down my analysis of the data to what Vygotsky (1934) points out in *The problem of the environment*. In this paper, Vygotsky (1934) brings to the attention of the reader the in depth interaction between the individual and the environment by pointing out the relative position of the individual in relation to *perezhivanie*. Vygotsky (1934) writes

I would like to start with something which we have already discussed in passing, namely that for a proper understanding of the role which environment plays in child development it is always necessary, if one can put it this way, to approach environment not with an absolute but a relative yardstick. At the same time environment should not be regarded as a condition of development of a child by virtue of the fact that it contains certain qualities or features, but one should always approach environment at a given stage of his development (p. 2).

What Vygotsky (1934) points out here is that Paola was interacting with the environment in way that was fluid and constantly changing and the individuals in the environment (the ESL 101 course)-the instructor, the SI tutor, and the other students in the course were playing a major role in shaping how Paola was acquiring academic writing at the time of the study. In turn, the “relative yardstick” used by Vygotsky (1934) suggests that the process of acquiring academic writing for Paola was continually undergoing qualitative changes due to Paola’s interaction with the environment at different stages during the ESL 101 course in spring 2008.

When I observed the ESL 101 Course after this first interview, I asked the ESL 101 instructor and the SI tutor if they were noticing improvements in the use of writing in the ESL 101 course. From the notes in my Researcher’s Journal I wrote “According to what they said, they noticed that international students are writing better and with more focus.” I wanted to verify this statement from the ESL 101 Course and the SI tutor. I went back to see Paola’s later writing assignments and noticed that the comments from the ESL 101 instructor were more focused on helping Paola to be more assertive in expressing her ideas in English. Paola’s writing in this assignment was to write a letter to apply for a scholarship. The first paragraph Paola wrote presented the following rhetorical pattern

I have an International Economics bachelor’s in Chihuahua, Mexico. I am an entrepreneur person, so I have always looked to expand my horizons, increase my knowledge in subjects related to my career. At the same time I have looked for opportunities to succeed in every aspects of my life, and I see your University as a great step forward achieving this housing pay as scholarship to let me go there and study the master’s degree with you.

The instructor's comments in the track changes were focused on the strength, organization and details of Paola's ideas and not on the grammar or the mechanics. The instructor commented

Let's be more specific. What opportunities? What risks? What are your future goals? What do you plan to do after you graduate? How will this scholarship help you achieve your goals? Use strong, powerful language: strive, desire, enthusiastic, work, believe, encourage, develop, create, and design.

The conference on this writing assignment demonstrated that Paola was making progress according to the ESL 101 instructor and the SI tutor. The ESL 101 instructor made this comment during the conference with Paola

When you talk about the scholarship, you need to tell the people that will read the letter in what ways the scholarship will help you in your career. Ok. The committee that will read your letter wants to know why the scholarship is so important to you. What the scholarship can and will do for you if you get it. Ok? You must tell the readers of your application specifically what you want to do. It is important because they want to give money to applicants that have very clear ideas about what they want to do with the scholarship; how they will make their life better with more opportunities.

Paola's second interview further corroborated my perception of what Paola academic writing was by the second and last interview I conducted almost at the end of the semester. Paola told me that she noticed from the comments in her paper from the ESL 101 instructor that she made improvements in her grammar, mechanics and ability to express her ideas in English. Paola said "Writing different papers is helping me improve my writing in English. I

think that this is a good and positive experience for me. I think that I am learning a lot of new things as an international student and as a writer.”

When I went back to read Paola’s Reflection Paper I carefully read the writing assignment to see if Paola was reflecting back on what she said during the interviews or the comments made by the ESL 101 instructor, the SI tutor and other thoughts that were captured in her final Reflection Paper. The opening of Paola’s Reflection Paper for her portfolio assignment for the ESL 101 Course points out the winding and difficulty road to be an international student and write in English

When I came to the University of New Mexico I never realized how difficult it will be to me. I never thought that English 101 class was about writing papers. So it was totally different to me because I had never written a letter of experience in English. At the beginning of the semester it was kind of confusing. I tried to think in Spanish, so by then I translated it to English and this was one of my first problems....but I am a better writer than when I came.

Paola’s starting point as an academic writer was difficult as she pointed out at the beginning but nonetheless important to learn to become a better academic writer in English at the end of her journey in the ESL 101 course. Paola pointed out at the end of her Reflection Paper that the experience in the classroom was very positive and constructive towards becoming a better writer in English. She said

I have been learning how to use verbs, commas, words, present perfect, past perfect, cover letter, fanboys, dependent words, etc...The English “SI Leader” was working hard out of the class with some students. I was one of those. It was hard but so helpful for me because I was the only from Mexico in this class and the rest of the students

were from Japan and China. So, our SI Leader made us to work in groups and share our knowledge about what we were learning in our English class, also we shared some keys of writing and speaking rules (p.2).

Paola's final Reflection Paper indicated that her experience in the ESL 101 Course was positive and constructive and that the support she received was important to her growing as a student and second language writer. Paola emphasized the importance of group work and learning from others in her Reflection Paper twice. The second time she pointed out "I also can say that I learned from my classmates. The way they used to talk and say things that I wanted to say too, but I could not." Paola was referring to her problems with spoken English at the beginning of the semester in the ESL 101 course and how the system of support in the course, from the instructor, students, and SI leader helped her become a better writer in English and eventually a better student. Paola's final reflection piece in her paper suggests that she was feeling positive about her future as an international student in an American University: "I feel that everything that I have done here will open me other doors that I was looking forward."

The emergence of a personal voice and positionality was due to Paola's ability to become part of the environment through academic writing (Vygotsky, 1934). Paola became part of the environment of the ESL 101 course by interacting and learning within a complex system of knowledge and communication. Paola's individual factors interacted with the social, cultural, and academic factors for the acquisition of academic writing in English as L2. *Perezhivanie* in Paola's and Tom's case was the portal through which the process of academic writing in English as L2 took place.



## Laura's case

*Making sense of academic writing.* Laura's narrative essay on intercultural communication draft presented a pattern that I found in Tom's essay on the same theme. The instructor wrote a comment on the track changes pointing out that Laura had to narrow down the topic of her essay. The instructor wrote "Okay you've started well. You being with a global comment and narrow, but the last sentences seem still too much broad. Try to be more specific; exactly what difficulties are you going to talk about?" (p.1)

The instructor's comments were directed to what Laura wrote in her introduction. Laura opened up her essay on intercultural communication titled *A New Life in America* as follows

To do research and work in America was my husband's dream. Last year, I followed my husband to come to Albuquerque. Filled with hope and curiosity, we began our new life in America. For newcomers, life is not easy. A new life means that you will be exposed to new environments; you will experience a different culture. At the same time, it means that you will face a lot of difficulties (p.1).

I read the rubric again and found the same missing explanation of what "narrow" means. The rubric had a comment from the instructor in the part of the rubric on how to organize the body of the paper "Too broad" with no other explanation put in the rubric. Also Laura's paper had comments in the track changes always reminding Laura to narrow down the topic and use more details in her narrative essay. Laura wrote in the body of her paper

While I share the American culture, I often meet the embarrassment matters. I make an effort to be a "normal" person but it is just a good will. Last year, I enrolled classes of nursing assistant in Nursing Home. After class, I was looking for a bathroom and

could not find it. I asked an old lady who was sitting in a wheel chair. Then she said something that I could not understand. She began to move her chair, and I thought she would help me to find a bathroom. After going around a circle, she went on to say to me “oxygen.” But I still did not understand. I said to her “I will ask another person.” (p.2)

What I noticed was that the details were there and that Laura was trying to narrate an experience that was embarrassing for her with the details in an order that make sense to her. I asked Laura at the end of the class if she knew what narrow down and details meant to her narrative essay. She said that she had an idea but she was not able to tell me exactly what she had to do to improve her paper. I followed the same ritual of asking questions to the instructor and the SI tutor in the ESL 101 course and what they told me was that Laura’s English proficiency was lower than other students in the classroom and that Laura was scheduling an appointment with the SI tutor to discuss her narrative essay in details. I wrote in my Researcher’s Journal “I will ask Laura about her meeting with the SI tutor after the conference with the instructor...important!!”

I was pondering on what the instructor and the SI tutor told me on Laura’s English proficiency and what she needed to improve her academic writing. From the data collected and samples reported here I noticed that Laura had difficulties with grammar, lexicon, and mechanics in her essay on intercultural communication. Also, I noticed during my observation in the ESL 101 course that Laura did not ask many questions and used to write her notes in Chinese instead than English. I asked her why and Laura told me that she was feeling more secure if she used her first language.

In my Researcher's Journal I wrote one comment: "Laura is the only participant that is using such a strategy for taking notes in the classroom. More secure in her first language." This comment from my Researcher's Journal allowed me to look at Laura's acquisition and use of academic writing in English with an eye on what it means to enter a discourse community in a different language and the problems associated with understanding the meanings of that discourse community. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that individuals use different tools to master or solve problems in the environment. Vygotsky (1978) also points out that this condition is unique to individuals in society. Laura was using an external tool, her first language Chinese, to make sense of the content of the class and the ESL 101 writing requirements in particular. Laura was using academic writing as a cognitive and external tool to comply with the academic writing requirements of the ESL 101 course and being able eventually to use academic writing in different contexts or its generalizations.

Academic writing as a cognitive tool was important for Laura to internalize the system of academic writing in its rhetorical and language conventions to use them appropriately in the different genres requirements of the ESL 101 course. The cognitive and the academic environment were constantly interacting when Laura was using different tools (her first language for instance) to use her internal system of meaning to make sense of her experience, understanding and use of academic writing in English in the ESL 101 course during spring 2008 (Vygotsky, 1978).

Mahn (2008) points out that meaning is not just in the external sign we call word but is a systematic development of human experience that gives meaning to language. For Laura, her reliance on her first language, Chinese, was due to her reliance on what she knew as a well-known system of meaning and her beginning knowledge in relation to academic writing

in English. As the data from this study suggest, Laura was entering a new academic parlor (Burke, 1973) where new and unfamiliar discourses were not part of Laura's system of meaning yet.

*The conference and the feedback in the narrative essay.* The day of the conference between Laura and the instructor I followed my usual routine by preparing my tape recorder, the draft on the narrative essay on intercultural communication and when the conference began I sat down with the tape recorder on and listened to what the instructor and Laura had to say. The comments made by the instructor were focused once again on the level of details in Laura's narrative essay. The instructor said

My concern here is that you are way too broad. Ok? You are trying to focus on too many things. Ok? Your introduction is good "To do research in America was my husband dream. I followed my husband when he came to Albuquerque." See, you started off with this kind of background and this is great because you explain to me why you did come to the U.S. Ok. But then it is the last sentence where you state that you had a lot of difficulties. Ok. But what I would like to see you do is narrow that even more. Ok? Because if you finish with a lot of difficulties, it is like, you know...what difficulties? Ok?

Laura was listening to what the instructor was saying but she did not say much just "Yes" and no other comments. I noticed that the instructor was pointing out to narrow down the topic but I did not find reading the conference transcripts an example that could elucidate this important point in Laura's narrative essay. In another part of the conference, the instructor continued to emphasize on narrowing down the topic in Laura's narrative essay by going over another part of the draft. The instructor commented

I want you to focus on one or two and not all of the difficulties. Ok? Some of these things that you said here like being silent rather than speaking. Ok? That you learned that for some reasons that being silent rather than speaking is the best approach. Ok? The best thing to do here in the United States. Ok? What do you mean by that? That's another difficulty? Ok? In China, did you feel free to talk and to speak and all of the sudden in the United States you have to be kind of silent. I do not know. That's a kind of difficulty. Ok? Not just language but it is a cultural difference. Ok? Talk about those. Ok?

Once again, Laura just said "ok" and did not ask clarification questions after the instructor's comments on her draft. I asked Laura in the post conference interview if she knew what to do. She said to me that she was "kind of sure" but she wanted to ask for an appointment with the SI tutor in CAPS to go over her draft and address some issues raised by the instructor.

The day after my observation in the classroom, I asked the SI tutor if Laura made the appointment and what was the main issue with her draft on the narrative essay. The SI tutor told me that Laura was working hard on her academic English but she was a student with a lower level of English than other students in the classroom and needed more time to understand how to write according to academic writing conventions. I also noticed, during my observations, that Laura was shy and did prefer not to raise questions in the classroom even though she seemed at times having difficulties understanding what to do for her writing.

When I interviewed Laura I had the same perception even though I was not close enough to her to ask such a personal question. She was the participant that talked the least during the two interviews and her comments were always very short and to the point. One

excerpt from one of the interviews fronts Laura's personality. When I asked the participants about the ESL 101 course, they were pretty specific and vocal about what was working or not. Instead Laura made a very brief comment

My course is [ESL 101] is going well. I am taking English 101 now and applied for the Physician Assistant Program at the University of New Mexico. I was a physician in China so I want to have the same career in the United States.

The comment was to the point, short and afterwards Laura did not say much during the interview. This was my perception of Laura during the study. A very polite and shy person that did not talk much or made comments out of context. While I am rereading the interview transcripts I can remember that she was always choosing to seat in the back of the room during the ESL 101 classroom. She was not talking much and even during group work or students' discussion she preferred to listen to the other students instead of asking questions. Laura was more a listener than a talker and her interaction with the ESL 101 Course maintained this pattern until the end of the semester.

This interesting aspect bring to the fore an important component of the theoretical framework for this study or the problem of the environment or perezhivanie as already pointed out in Paola's case. It is interesting since the data front Laura's personality with her learning experience in the ESL 101 course. Same instructor, material and support but different level of acquisition of academic writing in relation to the other participants in the study during spring 2008. The problem of the environment as discussed in Vygotsky (1934) is a paramount aspect of this study since Laura as the other participants in the study was constantly interacting with the socio cultural context of the course, going through changes in her understating of the academic writing requirements in the ESL 101 course and the

environment was changing as well since the instructor and the SI tutor were adapting their support system according to Laura's needs and level of understating of academic writing in English in the ESL 101 course as demonstrated by the L2 conferences, the interviews, the observations and the Researcher's Journal notes.

***The instructor's voice.*** Laura's personality prompted me to have more contacts and ask more questions to the instructor to the ESL 101 course and the SI tutor to make sure that my perceptions of Laura's progress in the ESL 101 course were supported by the data. I did not want to rely only on the writing samples but delve into Laura's interaction with the classroom, students, instructor, and SI tutor to better contextualized Laura's acquisition of academic writing during spring semester 2008.

***Making sense of the instructor's support.*** The analysis of the research paper presented the same issues that I noticed in Paola and Tom's papers. Since this was a research group project, the comments from the instructor and the level of accuracy in the paper are not indicative of Laura's level of academic writing. Laura's research group paper *Shopping on Line vs. the Mall* was written in a very neat and professional way. The paper began with an abstract according to some of the suggestions in the handout on how to write a research paper given by the instructor. In the abstract, the group for the research paper project reported

The study is based on the survey of 50mpeople in UNM campus. In America, shopping on-line is so common that nearly everyone has experienced it. But the attitudes for shopping on-line or mall are different. Some people prefer to shop on internet, others do not. We analyzed the benefit and disadvantages of shopping on internet compared with shopping at the mall by the questionnaire. The results demonstrate most people prefer to shop online because it has some benefits, such as

faster, easier, and cheaper. The minority dislike this way, since they worry about internet safety. The conclusion is that most people are willing to shop online although there are some safety problems on the internet (p.1).

The comments of the instructor during the conference were very positive as the one in the track changes. Most of the comments were pointing out details that Laura and her group had to take care of but these details were not affecting the form and content of the paper. One comment said

The fraction needs to be changed into percentage. Ok? Consider 12 students that buy books on-line. What percent out of everybody? You interviewed 40 people in your sample, ok? So, what percentage is this? Instead of being 12 students out of 40, what percentage buys books on-line? Is that 30% 32%? Ok? The percentage will tell use more than this. Ok? So, all of the data we need to convert into percentage. Ok?

When the conference between Laura and the instructor of the ESL 101 Course was over, I asked Laura just one question: “Which part of the paper did you write?” Laura told me that she was the one to be in charge to write down the numbers and to distribute and collect the questionnaire and that she was more at ease in this role in the group. I also asked the SI tutor Laura’s progress in academic writing after my observation in the ESL 101 course and the SI tutor pointed out that Laura made good progress in her academic writing along the semester. Since I could not confirm such an assessment from the research paper on Shopping On-line vs. the Mall I focused my analysis on Laura’s Reading Journal the letter of intent Laura wrote as one of the assignments in the ESL 101 Course and the final Reflection Paper for her portfolio.



***Laura's personal voice and positionality.*** Laura wrote in her Reading Journal on *Los Pobres* a reading from the textbook written by Richard Rodriguez. The reading is part of the author's autobiography *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. The author narrates his struggles as a Mexican American assimilating to life in the United States. The beginning of the reading is an anecdote from his life at Stanford. The author writes

It was at Stanford, one day near the end of my senior year, that a friend told me about a summer construction job he knew was available. I was quickly alert. Desire uncoiled with me. My friend said that he knew I had been looking for summer employment. He knew I needed some money. Almost apologetically he explained: It was something I probably wouldn't be interested in, but a friend of his, a contractor, needed someone for the summer to do menial jobs. There would be lots of shoveling and raking and sweeping. Nothing too hard. But nothing more interesting either. Still, the pay would be good. Did I want it? Or did I know someone who did? I did. Yes, I said, surprised to hear myself say it (p.274).

Laura's connection and comments to the reading *Los Pobres* begins by explaining the meaning of the words from the Spanish language. Laura writes that *Los Pobres* means poor in Spanish. The most important part of Laura's response to the reading is her focus on what the author's friend did for him by proposing the writer of the memoir a summer job. Laura wrote

He has a good and honest friend. His friend not only introduces his job, but also tells him what is the job really like. It is very important for him to know about the "real work" which is helpful to prepare for the job sufficiently, especially in psychology.

Laura was writing by overlapping what the author said in the reading and her personal experience still demonstrating problems to organize her ideas in a more clear and coherent way. I wrote something related to this issue in my Researcher's Journal: "Ask if she worked with the instructor or SI tutor on this part of her writing." As usual, after my classroom observation I asked Laura the question jotted down in my journal and Laura told me that she was trying to address this issue but it was not easy for her since as she pointed out Chinese writing is always circular and overlapping. She could not avoid such a pattern in her writing at that time but was working hard not make the same mistake later on.

Laura's was supported by the SI tutor in CAPS in her effort to improve her academic writing. The SI tutor was an important part of Laura's academic writing acquisition and use since the SI was an integral part of the environment in the ESL 101 class. The SI tutor was supporting Laura in becoming an academic writer in a second language by addressing issues in her written language to be successful in the ESL 101 course. Laura was working within different genres in the ESL 101 classroom and slowly moving towards a better interaction with academic writing in English and better command of the language (Hyland, 2004).

In the letter of intent, written by Laura to get a scholarship in the Boston School of Medicine, the instructor's comments were focused on word choice, grammar and suggestions, as usual, for a better organization of the paper. The transcripts from the conference related to this particular writing assignment, emphasized tense agreement in English and how to present Laura's professional persona in the letter. The comment on the tense agreement in English said

First you need to pay attention to tense agreement. If you use the past tense you are talking about an action that you did in the past. It is important not to confuse the

reader otherwise your letter will not be strong enough for the committee. You could say something like this: “Our work on monoclonal was...hum...outstanding...hum...the Institute work was outstanding.” It is important to sound very positive and convincing in your letter. It must be more than using the word satisfied. Ok?

Laura, as I pointed out earlier in my analysis, was not very interactive during the conference and was paying attention to the instructor by nodding or by saying “Ok” or “Yes.” The part on the word choice presented just suggestions on how to use words that are strong such as “I am the best candidate” for the position or “I have the competence to cover the position.” Laura told me in the short post conference interview that she had already scheduled an appointment in CAPS to go over the letter of intent and that the SI tutor was going to address the same issues discussed by the instructor during the conference.

The SI tutor told me that she noticed an improvement in Laura’s writing in the area of organization of ideas and details. She pointed at the copy of the draft she had in her hands after the class and commented that for Laura the issue of verb agreement was still something they had to work on. Overall, as the SI tutor told me and I summarized in my Researcher’s Journal, Laura was making progress in her academic writing and working hard towards writing better papers in the ESL 101 course.

The Reflection Paper for Laura’s portfolio for the ESL 101 Course demonstrated awareness on Laura’s ability to understand who she was as an international student and the importance of the ESL 101 course for improving her academic writing. She wrote

To have a chance to enter American class is my new experience. In the past time, I was imbued in Chinese culture and traditional education. The culture difference

between East and West makes me curious for American class. In America, students could speak anything that they want, while the teacher never criticizes that what students said....But the most impressive thing for me is what we have learned is so practical that we could apply the knowledge in the future job.

Laura expanded and refined this opening statement in different parts of the paper by critically analyzing her growth as an international student and second language writer.

Laura's Reflection Paper pinpoints the qualitative changes she went through during spring semester 2008 in the ESL 101 Course. This awareness of Laura's qualitative changes is found in two parts of the reflection paper in particular. The former is when Laura talks about her writing styles as an academic writer in English. Laura wrote

I have learned how to concentrate my ideas. I often make mistake that I express one idea, maybe the reader is waiting for the comment followed, but I have not written more sentences to explain it. For instance, there is a sentence "Sometimes we seem to be no choice but to remain silent and withdraw from new surroundings." In the following, I should give examples to demonstrate it, but I talk about others instead of continuing it (P.2).

Laura here was recalling the first comments made by the instructors in the intercultural communication paper and what she had to do to improve her academic writing in English. The excerpt from Laura's Reflection Paper suggests that Laura went through important qualitative changes in her level of understanding of academic writing and these qualitative changes are reflected in her ability to write and discuss them in her final paper for the ESL 101 Course.

The second part where Laura demonstrated awareness and qualitative changes in her academic writing is found in her reflection in the importance of the SI tutor in the ESL 101 Course. Laura said

SI instruction is my favorite another class, which helped me to improve my English skills. I have learned verb tense: past, present, past perfect, and present perfect. I learned the grammar ten years ago; however, I often make mistakes when I write an essay. Since I attended the SI instruction, I begin to pay more attention to verb tense, which let me deduce the happening of mistakes.

Laura's academic writing awareness in the final Reflection Paper was laid out throughout the paper and suggests that the ESL 101 Course supported Laura's efforts to become a better academic writer in English. From the role of the instructor to the other students in the ESL 101 Course the data suggest that Laura had a very positive and transforming experience in the ESL 101 Course during spring semester 2008. The last sentence in the final Reflection Paper is indicative of such a transformation when Laura said "I will remember my teacher and my classmates in my heart, after all, it was my first time to take American class, and it was a memorable experience!"

The data suggest that the systematic collaboration between the instructor, SI tutor and Laura in the ESL 101 course supported Laura's acquisition of academic writing and Laura's first steps in using a new system of communication and knowledge. From the final Reflection Paper Laura was beginning to generalize the importance of ESL 101 for her future success as a university student in the United States. The system of support embedded in the ESL 101 course seemed to be successful according to the data collected and gave Laura the

opportunity to move to a better stage of academic writing and awareness of its importance in the overall system of the academia in a U.S. university.

In Laura's case, perezhivanie demonstrates that Laura's personality was an important factor in her acquisition of academic writing as L2 in the ESL 101 course. Laura's shy behavior during this study affected her acquisition of academic writing in the course. This was due to her inability to fully connect with the learning environment, as I observed during my study, and, as she said during the interviews, her difficulty connecting with the instructor and her other peers in the ESL 101 course. Once again, the same objective situation produced a different experience in the ESL 101 course for Laura and the way in which, and the degree to which she acquired and used academic writing in English as L2.

### **Susan's case**

***Making sense of academic writing.*** Susan's first paper for the ESL 101 Course, the narrative essay on intercultural communication, was written on Susan's problems to understand what to do once she landed in San Francisco and saw the U.S for the first time. She began her essay by describing her feelings when she arrived in the U.S. for the first time

I just finished the 11 hour air trip. At the moment the plane got off the ground at San Francisco airport I know I would start another phase of my life, a whole new world was waiting for me, which means a lot of exciting as well as problems and difficulties, which began just as I got off the plane.

The instructor from the ESL 101 Course made only one comment related to this opening paragraph "verb tense" referring to the use of "I know" instead of "I knew." My focus in looking at the track changes in Susan's paper was to see if some patterns on details

and organization were surfacing in her paper as happened for the other participants. In the second paragraph Susan wrote

Passengers were divided into two groups-US citizens and visitors. As a F1 visa student, I was asked several questions, “What kind of classes will you take?” “I don’t know I replied. I totally forgot the curriculum sheets that the Nursing College sent me. Then the official looked at me with suspicion “Is that normal you do not know what classes you will take?” “I think so.” Without speaking a word, he stamped on my documents, I was admitted.

The comments from the instructor were positive but they were pointing out to a lack of description Susan had to address in this part of the narrative paper. The instructor wrote “This is good and your responses are classic! Now, can you describe the scene at the airport? Noisy, crowded, confused with all the commotion and different languages?”

As usual, I went back to the rubric and see if the instructor wrote some more comments or if an explanation of what descriptive meant was inserted in the rubric. What I found were marks on the different parts of the essay but not further explanation on the issue of lack of description in the narrative essay. I wanted to wait until the next observation and conference to see if the instructor was going to address this point in the classroom.

The day of my observation I listened carefully to what the instructor was saying and demonstrating in the classroom. He was going over the narrative essay for the first part of the class and then was moving on to talk about the next writing assignment, the Research Paper. I noticed that the SI tutor was there as well and she was taking notes on what the instructor was saying. At the end of the class period I asked the SI tutor about the nature of the notes and she told me that she was trying to see how to help the students to improve their narrative

essay on intercultural communication since the same issue on description, details, and organization of the paper was surfacing in many of the international students in the ESL 101 course. I could not talk to Susan that day since she had to rush to another class. I had to wait until the conference to see if I could ask her questions on the narrative essay.

The observation of the ESL 101 classroom brought to the fore the interactive nature of the SI tutor in the ESL 101 course. When I asked her why she was taking notes and she said to me because she wanted to help students with their narrative essay, the learning environment in which academic writing was taught shows that writing was not isolated act of writing words on paper but was found in an environment where the same objective situation (the SI instructor taking notes to address individual issues in the narrative essay of the students in the classroom) generated different experiences in academic writing as the data on Laura's show (Mahn, 2008; Vygotsky, 1934).

When the SI tutor was taking notes on how to support students in the ESL 101 course in their narrative essay and my participants in particular she was part of the lived experience of the classroom or what Vygotsky (1934) defines as *perezhivanie*. The SI tutor by the act of writing what was needed by the students during the ESL 101 course was not only interacting with the environment or the same objective situation but was changing the way instruction was delivered in the same physical space. The SI was using her cognitive ability to understand what the narrative essay requirements were to support students in their effort to improve this specific genre of academic writing. By cognitively connecting with what the instructor was explaining on the requirements to write a narrative essay and her notes or understating of what these needs were the SI tutor was actively being a part of the qualitative



changes students were going through in their acquisition and use of academic writing in English in the ESL 101 course.

*The conference and the feedback in the narrative essay.* The day of the conference I followed my usual rituals by tape recording the conference and by paying attention to what points the instructor was highlighting during the conference with Susan. I noticed as this happened for the other three participants in the study that the focus of the instructor was to go over the track changes in the draft and try to clarify some of the feedback written in the paper. The instructor said

Good essay, ok? It is a very good thing. Really! How can you get to the airport and then the way you created this dialogue is very very funny, very creative. Ok?

Hum...your responses are classic. You know. This means that if someone says classic this is good. Ok? Can you describe the scene at the airport? Can you go in this with more details so we can kind of see this airport through your eyes? You are going to walk through the San Francisco airport people are hustling and bustling and bumping into each other with bags and the children and, you know, and you are looking at all the signs that are in English and where do you go?

The rest of the conference was to go over the other parts or comments made by the instructor in the draft of the narrative essay with Susan that was paying attention to what the instructor was saying without saying much. From the transcripts of this conference there was no much interaction between the instructor and Susan. At the end of the conference, I asked Susan if she knew what to do. Susan told me that she knew what the instructor wanted from her and was going to work hard to improve her narrative essay. I also asked Susan if she was going to make an appointment with the SI tutor. Susan told me later in the week after she was

going to work on her paper a little bit more. She said that she needed extra help for the paper in organization and grammar since she did not think that her English was strong enough at the time of the study.

***The instructor's voice.*** The next observation time, the instructor was going through the research paper with the students in the ESL 101 class. The instructor asked students to have the copied chapter on how to write research paper and the handout ready since he wanted to go over the important elements of the research paper and make sure that students knew what to do. The SI tutor was in the classroom and as usual she was taking notes while the instructor was explaining what to do for the research paper.

After students listened to the instructor and were taking notes on the handout and the photocopied article on how to write research papers and reports, they worked in their groups (the research paper was a group work as I already pointed out) to begin to discuss what to do and how to complete the assignment. The instructor and the SI tutor were going around the room and were spending time with the different groups making sure to answer their questions. I stopped by my participants and listened to what they were discussing in their group. The main point discussed was how to share the work, how to go about the literature review, and how to write the paper. I wrote in my Researcher's Journal "They are focusing on what the instructor said."

Another thing that I noticed was that the SI was asking some of the students and my participants which part of the research paper they wanted to discuss during the SI sessions in CAPS. Susan said the organization and the grammar since she wanted to make sure that the paper was well organized and the grammar was correct. I jotted down in my Researcher's Journal "Susan is working hard on what she wants to improve...same thing she did for the

narrative essay.” The class ended with the instructor wrapping up what was discussed and reminded students to stop by his office or ask an appointment to the SI tutor to work on the research paper in CAPS.

***Making sense of the instructor’s support.*** The research paper wrote by Susan and her group was a very good one. The comments from the instructor were positive and not major flaws came out in the draft I got from Susan. Some of the comments were focusing on the introduction and the presentation of the data. The comments on the introduction were very positive. The instructor commented “Good introduction. Brief and to the point and it gives the major research questions for your project.” Another comment on the data pointed out that “Okay, this is a good graph, but what does it tell us? After each graph, please provide a written description of the graph content.”

I asked Susan the way the Research Paper was written and she told me that the group work on the Research Paper was better because she could ease her writing process. Moreover, Susan said that the SI sessions in CAPS were very helpful because she had the opportunity to go over the paper in detail and understand what to do. This came out during our first interview and gave me the opportunity to see how Susan and the other participants in the study were trying to use the system of support for academic writing CAPS and the instructor in the ESL 101 course to improve their writing in English.

***Susan’s personal voice and positionality.*** What Susan said during our first interview and what she pointed out even during the second interview was that English was hard for her in the area of organization, grammar, and mechanics and she was working hard in the class and with the SI instructor to improve in these areas since she knew that writing could “open many doors for her future career in the U.S.” She also told me that “I am trying to read more

and more and use the textbook readings and the Reading Journal to improve my writing in the ESL 101 class.” I found this point very interesting and wanted to see what kind of writing Susan was producing in her Reading Journal since she was something that she pointed out during the interview.

Susan’s first choice for writing in her Reading Journal was the reading from the textbook, *Polite but Thirsty*. She made the same choice as Tom since as she pointed out in her writing this reading was expressing some her feelings to be an international student in the US. She wrote

The author of ‘Polite but Thirsty’ does express some of my feelings of exposing to new and unfamiliar surroundings. It is the 16th day since I’ve landed on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. I feel my English level and experiences are both limited. On the bus I even do not know where to put the one dollar paper buck and I try to put it in the coin slot.

Susan, as she pointed out during the interviews, was working hard on her writing since she wanted to become a better writer and student. She said to me after one of my observations in the ESL 101 Course that “She knew writing was the most important thing she had to work hard otherwise she could not graduate from the University of New Mexico.” Susan’s writing in the other assignments, the formal letter and the final reflection paper, shows this commitment to become a better academic writer.

In the formal letter Susan had to write for the ESL 101 Course, Susan demonstrated a better command of grammar and organization of ideas as pointed out by the instructor in the track changes and the comments during the conference with Susan on the same assignment. One comment in the track changes pointed out “It is good to refer the readers to your resume

and experience, but here you should highlight some of the most impressive and most appropriate experiences.” The same comments were made during the conference on the letter of intent where the instructor was helping Susan understand how to be more persuasive and present her ideas in a more specific and clearer way. A comment made by the instructor during the conference elucidates this point

When you say here “I am a student working at the University of New Mexico Hospital Complex” I thought that this is not clear because the use of the word complex can be very confusing here. Complex can be misleading in this context because it does not tell me much about the place you are working, ok? When you say “Complex Hospital” this tells me that you have different units at the hospital and they are separate buildings. Ok? This means that it is not a complex, just one hospital but units that are not different buildings, ok?

The comment made by the instructor was made with the goal to help Susan understand how to become a better writer when using the genres of the letter of intent to be used for a scholarship or graduate school. What Susan said to me after the conference was “I am getting better...I think I got the point from the instructor.” (Researcher’s Journal notes). The final Reflection Paper Susan wrote for her portfolio is an important window where I could see her efforts to become a better academic writer in English using self-reflection at the end of the ESL 101 Course.

Susan pointed out in her Reflection Paper that she found the ESL 101 Course and the support from the instructor and the SI tutor very helpful. She also said that the conferences with the instructor were very important for her since she was able to go over her writing in a way that she could not do it during classroom instruction. Susan commented

My experience in the ESL 101 was very important to me as an international student. I know have more confidence as a writer and my writing skills improved since I began to study at the University of New Mexico. The instructor and the SI tutor were very helpful during the semester to help me with my writing since it was very difficult for me to understand what to do on my own. I think that I will succeed in my undergraduate degree in Nursing if I continue to improve as a writer and student.

Susan used the word *experience* in her final Reflection Paper for her Portfolio for the ESL 101 course. It is worth to notice that Susan's understating of her experience in the ESL 101 course was in alignment with what the other participants in the course wrote on the importance to become better writers in English but also *experience* was acquiring a personal meaning in that Laura said "I think that I will succeed in my undergraduate degree in Nursing if I continue to improve as a writer and student."

The same objective situation, the ESL 101 course, yielded a different experience in Laura since writing was perceived as a way to succeed in her Nursing career different from the other participants in the study and was perfectly in line with Laura's goals to become a nurse and learn to write in English to be successful in her career. The data also suggest that Laura's acquisition of academic writing was a process in which cognitive and affective or emotional factors were important in becoming aware and understating how to improve as an academic writer in English as L2 (Robbins, 2011; Vygotsky, 1934, 1987).

I met with the participants to the present study after the semester to say thank you for their support for my study and asked them if they were ready for the other courses they had to take. They told me that they were sure that they could do a good job in the other courses and that they believed their writing in English was better at that time. The participants to the

study said that the overall experience in the ESL 101 Course and the support they received during their first semester at the University of New Mexico was encouraging for them since they knew they could count on places on campus where tutors they could help them with their writing skills and study skills as well and successfully fulfill their academic and professional goals.

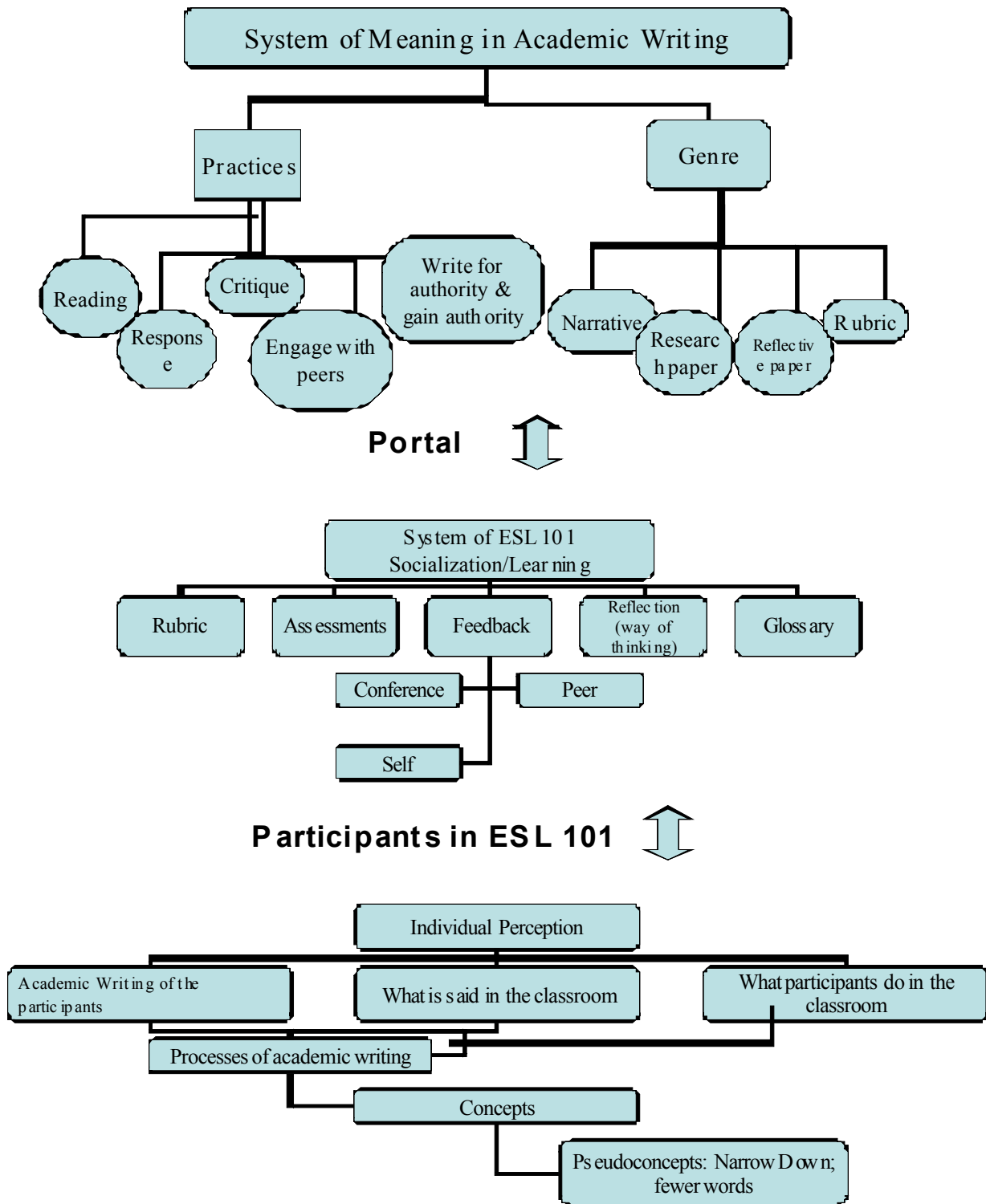
Susan's ability to circle back and reflect on her experience as a second language writer in the ESL 101 course was embedded in the data collected for her case study.

The data collected about Susan showed that she was aware of her problems with academic writing in English as L2. Her ability to reflect on her problems in grammar and organization in discussing her problems with her instructor and SI instructor, as well as her ability to overcome her frustration by working hard on these areas of academic writing demonstrate that Susan was cognitively and emotionally (*perezhivanie*) interacting with the learning environment of the ESL 101 course. When Susan was discussing the Research Paper with her peers and asked for SI support, and was pointing out her problems in academic writing, Susan was systematically using the ESL 101 course to become a better second language writer.

Susan's *perezhivanie* was significant in the acquisition of academic writing in English as L2 in the ESL 101 course due to the fact that her emotional and cognitive abilities allowed Susan to delve into the issues that she was experiencing in the ESL 101 course. Her ability to ask questions to his instructor and the SI tutor, and to be very involved in the Research Paper group work, reveals her ability to systematically use her emotional and cognitive abilities to acquire an understanding of academic writing in English as L2 in the ESL 101 course.

Another factor that supported Laura's acquisition of academic writing in English as L2 in the ESL 101 course was her ability to use the English language to understand how to become a better second language writer. Her use of language in the classroom in the form of her questions to the instructor and SI tutor demonstrates that her perezhivanie was supporting her in her acquisition of academic writing in L2. Language seen from the perspective of perezhivanie opens up a new perspective on her ability to use academic English in the ESL 101 course due to Laura's use of language to express her cognitive and emotional status during her process of acquisition of academic writing in English as L2 in the course.





**Figure 1. Academic Writing System**

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

This study described how four international students acquired and used academic writing in English at the University of New Mexico in an ESL 101 Course during spring semester 2008. The study described the difficulties, system of support, and ability to deal with a high form of specialized language during their first year of transition in an institution of higher education in the United States. Moreover, I described how the interaction of the participants with the academic environment, the instructor, the extra academic support in the form of the SI tutor and CAPS became an integral part of their process of acquiring and using academic writing in English at the University of New Mexico.

Vygotsky's theoretical framework and in particular the concepts of system of meaning, a perezhivanie, and znachenie slova were important to explain the difficult and complex process of acquiring and using academic writing in English as a second language. The present study demonstrates that the acquisition of academic writing does not happen in a vacuum but is part of a system of learning in which the relationship between the environment and the participants in this study play a crucial role in the process of learning and using academic writing as L2 in academic contexts. Also, the theoretical framework based on Vygotsky's system of meaning demonstrates that each of the participants in the study learned and used academic writing in English according to his/her level of writing in a second language.

The system of learning in which the relationship between the environment and the participants supported the acquisition and use of academic writing in English was composed of three interrelated components: (a) academic writing as a general system of meaning where

practices and genres of academic writing represent the general system in which participants eventually became socialized by using the social, cultural and linguistic conventions of academic English; (b) the ESL 101 course as a *portal* through which the participants in this study entered the system of academic writing in the form of academic writing requirements to complete for the course and the system of socialization and learning embedded in the format of the ESL 101 course; (c) individual perceptions of the participants or the way they perceived the ESL 101 course and its academic writing requirements in English.

### **System of Meaning**

When the four participants began their formal instruction in academic writing in the ESL 101 Course in spring 2008 and were exposed to a new system of writing, thinking, and speaking, they had to learn a brand new system to convey ideas, to interact with their instructor and the other peers in a new environment as a work in progress, a continuous discover of how to adjust to new learning situations, academic conventions on how to access knowledge, and to interact and comply with the academic requirements of a new system of learning in higher education.

The role of the instructor and the SI tutor were paramount to support students in the acquisition of academic writing in form, content, and meaning. The participants in the study did not only acquire the language and rhetorical features of academic writing in English as a L2 but also the meaning of this very high specialized language of knowledge and communication. The formal instruction, the SI tutor sessions, the conferences were part of a system of meaning that was in place to support the participants' acquisition and use of academic writing in English as L2. Because of this system of meaning in place, the participants in this study were able to become more and more an integral part of the academic

writing system, its knowledge, and the ways the participants were communicating with the new academic environment during their first year in the United States.

The instructor's and the English Department pedagogical decisions influenced the students' ability to use system of meaning in the acquisition of academic writing as L2. From the syllabus to the conferences to the SI tutor and the group work in the ESL 101 course, the participants went through a systematic process of academic writing acquisition and use that became part of their new identity as international students in a US institution of higher education.

The participants in this study demonstrated through the data collected and analyzed that they were trying to adapt their way of learning and understanding to what the requirements of US institutions of higher education require from their students. From Tom to Susan, to Laura and Paola and from the interviews to the conferences to the informal conversations I had with them I saw their efforts to use their ability to understand the system, to navigate it and to be able to acquire academic writing and make any effort to become part of the system of instruction and knowledge in a US institution of higher education.

When Tom was reflecting back on the ESL 101 Course in his final Reflection Paper saying that his time in the class has been immensely rewarding, Tom was pointing out that he was able to use his system of meaning to make sense of academic writing and its cognitive and sociocultural demands. Tom did point out his difficulties with academic writing and his initial difficulties in understating and adapting to a new culture but also pointed out that he wanted to become a better student and better learner to achieve his goals in the United States by studying hard and become a better writer and reader. His system of meaning was in place to help him achieve those goals.

Tom's mention of his efforts to understand how to organize his ideas in the paper better and better or to use mechanics and grammar according to the requirements of the ESL 101 course indicate that Tom was aware of what to do to improve his academic writing in English. Also, Tom's ability to understand the feedback from the instructor and the SI tutor are indications of the development of a system of meaning that is able to unify thinking and speech [writing] processes in the sociocultural contexts of learning. Tom academic writing concepts from rhetorical structures to the academic language use were emerging and externalizing at the point of intersection between the cognitive and the sociocultural environment as the data demonstrate.

Tom's experience in the ESL 101 course demonstrates that system of meaning is closely related to the ability of the participants to use their cognitive ability to learn something that was new and unfamiliar to them. Tom and the other participants developed their academic skills in writing in a second language to be able to become part of the discursive practices of the academia in a U.S institution of higher education. The participants became aware and understood that the academic rituals of the instructor, the requirements from the course and the level of academic writing required at the University level were part of what they had to learn to become part of a larger system of knowledge and learning.

The system of meaning that the participants used to acquire academic writing in the ESL 101 course during spring semester 2008 is related to their motivation to learn and become better writers and students. The participants in this study pointed out in the interviews, and the reflection papers and the informal conversation recorded in my Researcher's Journal said that the ESL 101 course was important for them to develop their future plans in the US from a professional point of view. Tom, Paola, Susan, and Laura had

professional plans that could be achieved only by acquiring and use academic writing in L2 since they were aware of the requirements of the job market.

Tom wanted to become a professional business man and do something for his country as Paola. Susan and Laura wanted to become professionals in the medical field and use their experiences as a nurse and a doctor in their countries, China and Mongolia, to get the same opportunities in the U.S. They knew that without high writing skills these goals were difficult to achieve. The system of meaning used to acquire and use academic writing in English as L2 was paramount to lay out the foundations for their future academic success and goals.

### **Perezhivanie**

Many factors contributed to how the participants in this study perceived and understood their experience in the ESL 101 course and their experience as international students and academic writers in higher education. One of the most relevant factors is the classroom environment and the system of academic support that was in place at the time of this study. The data demonstrate that the classroom environment, the support from the SI tutor, the opportunity to work in groups for the research paper writing requirement influenced the way in which each of the participants used academic writing as L2. For instance, Susan's experience as an international student was different in terms of perception of the environment from the other participants. She pointed out that she had to improve her academic writing in grammar, mechanics, and organization and she was aware that she had to study harder than other students if she wanted to achieve a good command of academic writing in English. The importance of the environment as discussed by Vygotsky (1934) in *the problem of the environment* is paramount to understand how the same situation yields different experiences in the participants in this study.

Susan's perception of academic writing changed through the semester and Susan's ability to adapt to new requirements and to adjust her goals to improve in grammar, mechanics, and organization is reflected in her reflection paper where she points out how she was able to adapt to the different situations the ESL 101 course had and the ability to learn by relating to the environment and what the environment had to offer Susan in terms of academic support for her writing. In turn, Susan was interacting with the academic environment of the course and was constantly readapting to the needs and requirements of the ESL 101 course.

Susan perceived her experience as a positive one by saying that the activities in the ESL 101 course were important to improve her academic writing in English and internalized believed that her experience in the ESL 101 course was preparing her for more challenging academic work and her future career in the U.S. Susan's positive perception of the ESL 101 course played a crucial role in her commitment to pass the course and retain the knowledge important to become a successful student. Susan's reflective thinking in her final paper and in the interviews, as well as our informal conversation indicate that she had a positive interaction with the instructor, the SI tutor (CAPS) and her peers and this positive feeling was important for her in continuing to improve as a student in higher education and as a professional.

The classroom environment, the instructor, the SI tutor, and peer relationship analyzed by using the concept of perezhivanie became paramount in looking at the acquisition of academic writing in the participants in this study and to see how learning is not absolute in its nature but is a relative and high dynamic process in which many factors contributed to the learning process of the participants (Vygotsky, 1934). Perezhivanie helped

the participants in this study to shape their learning in relation to their learning abilities and the environment depending on how each of the participants in this study perceived their experiences as international students in a U.S institution of higher education in the process of acquiring academic writing as L2.

The importance of using the concept of *perezhivanie* helped me to see how my participants were able to grow with and in the academic environment of the ESL 101 course and become more confident writers and students in a U.S. institution of higher education. I observed and interacted with my participants and by collecting and analyzing data I could see how the perception of the academic environment in the ESL 101 course and at the university in general was positively growing through hard work and commitment to become better writers and students. The positive perceptions that my participants are grounded in the data of this study demonstrate that a systematic academic support can help students to overcome difficulties and learning blocks and unfold their potentials as learners and writers in the specifics.

Vygotsky (1934) points out that the individual always develops according to the reality that surrounds him/her and the participants in this study were not exempted from this process of development. The analysis of the data from the interviews to their writing samples demonstrate that the participants were able to grow and thrive by interacting with the environment, becoming problem solvers in their sociocultural context of learning. My participants demonstrated an ability to plan and evaluate their learning process as academic writers in English by participating in classroom activities, taking advantage of the academic system of support the University offered and by relaying of other more expert peers in the classroom when they had to solve problems related to their academic writing assignments.



The concept of *Perezhivanie* illuminates the similarities and differences between the participants and their reaction to particular aspects of American culture. For instance, when Tom wrote his response to *Friends and Strangers* in his Reading Journal pointing out the differences between friendship between Vietnam and the United States saying that friendship in his country seemed to be something more valued, Laura took a different positionality on the same reading by commenting “To me, the friendship of Arabs is too close to be accepted. I need more privacy to do my own business.” This suggests that their ability to interact with the learning tools of the environment showed critical thinking and awareness of the meaning and content of the reading. Moreover, Tom and Laura were reading the same passage with different eyes by using their own voice, their own experiences and emotions to make their experience has academic writers in L2 personal and meaningful (Bakhtin, 1981).

### **Social Situation of Development**

The present study demonstrates the importance of *the social situation of development* in the relationship between the participants and the environment in which the acquisition and use of academic writing took place (ESL 101 course). The three components in the diagram, the system of academic writing that inform knowledge production and dissemination in the academia, the ESL 101 course or the portal through which the participants became socialized in the system of learning via academic English, and their individual perceptions are part of the social situation of development of the present study.

The participants in the ESL 101 course had the opportunity to begin to interact with the environment and to become part of the system of instruction and learning in the ESL 101 course by using language to understand, clarify, and use academic concepts related to academic writing in English. Tom, Paola, Laura, and Susan brought to the ESL 101 course

their perceptions of what the exceptions were for the ESL 101 course, what they found once they began to interact with the instructor, the other peers and English academic writing and what eventually this interaction between the environment and the cognitive and emotional abilities of the participants yielded in terms of learning a new system of knowledge and communication.

Vygotsky (1978) suggests that *social situation of development* is important for second language learners and writers due to the crucial role that language plays in the development of higher psychological functions and to the ability to be aware and understand the environment in which learning takes place. The participants in this study had the opportunity to begin to understand a complex system of knowledge and communication, academic writing in English, by interacting with the instructor, the other peers, and the SI tutor in the classroom, the L2 conferences.

The participants began to use language in academic contexts in English to develop the ability to formulate concepts related to the system of academic writing and learning in the ESL 101 course. For instance, when the participants were using English in the classroom to ask questions to clarify concepts such as narrow down, organization of ideas, topic sentence and the like, they were using language within a social situation of development that supports that process to scaffold academic writing due to the fact that the participants attempted to have a better understanding of academic writing at their level of comprehension and use as second language writers in academic English contexts.

The *social situation of development* contextual to this study represents the framework in which a system of learning academic writing was used by using language as a portal to connect the cognitive and social dimension of academic writing in English. The language

processes in the classroom and the way language was used by the participants in this study influenced the thinking processes in L2 and eventually how the second language writers in this study acquired and used academic writing as a system of knowledge and communication in the ESL 101 course.

When the participants were asking the instructor and the SI tutor questions on how to improve their academic writing or when they were writing the Research Paper as a group, *the social situation of development* was the core of their acquisition and use of academic writing and language use to understand and clarify concepts was paramount in the participants' acquisition of academic writing in English as L2. The importance of *the social situation of development* in this study was the ability of the participants to understand and internalize the concepts of academic writing in English and to begin to become part of that academic socialization that is done through the use of academic writing among different disciplines in US universities.

When Mahn (2008) claims that meaning is formed by the unification of thinking and speaking processes where language plays a major role in the development of meaning in individuals, *the social situation of development* is an integral part of such important human activity because what the participants were trying to do was to make meaning out of the ESL 101 course by a unification of their speaking and thinking processes via the use of language to understand and clarify academic writing concepts in English.

The analysis of the data in the present study indicate that the participants in this study were using English language in the ESL 101 course to understand the systematic meaning of academic writing concepts explained in the ESL 101 course and the use of the English language among the participants influenced the way they perceived, understand, and used

academic writing in the ESL 101 course. The meaning of academic writing that emerged from the unification of the speaking and thinking processes in the participants in the data collected and analyzed in this study demonstrates that the participants internalized and understood academic writing as system of knowledge and communication in academic contexts.

### **Gaps in the Development of Academic Writing**

The issues that I noticed during my study in the development of academic writing in English in my participants were related to the context in which this learning process took place. I noticed that the ESL 101 course was structured in a way that did not allow the participants to formulate concepts through rich use of language to create the groundwork for acquiring academic writing in English within a richer context of language use and the scaffolding of a dialogue that promoted the ability to discuss and clarify concepts of academic writing in English.

Another gap that emerged in the teaching and learning of academic writing in English in the ESL 101 course from the analysis of the data was the limitations of the instructional format of the course. The course was lecture-oriented and the instructor's teaching rituals limited the participants in this study to use language in a richer and more interactive way to develop a better understanding of academic writing in the ESL 101 course.

Feedback from the instructor was limited in the track changes in the drafts and during the conferences the instructor repeated and tried to clarify the comments written in the track changes. The L2 conferences show that interaction between the instructor and the participants was very limited and the use of language to clarify important concepts of academic writing in English was almost absent. The participants in the study produced very

limited and not very significant answers or questions to clarify the concepts or issues in their academic writing in English.

During my observations I did not notice or record any session to prepare the participants in this study to use the L2 conferences in a way that promoted a better understanding of academic writing in English as L2. Research on L2 writing conferences suggests that students can use workshops to prepare them to fully participate in the conferences on their academic writing (Burke and Deidre, 2010). According to Burke and Deidre (2010) point out that workshop aimed at preparing students for writing conferences should be progressive in nature. Burke and Deidre (2010) explain the progressive nature of the writing conferences as the ability of the tutor to explain the nature of the conference, its rationale, why the conference is important for the students, and to help them understand how to use questions to create opportunities for a rich dialogue and clarification of difficult concepts during the day of the conference. Once again, during my observation in this study I did not notice the instructor going over these elements of the writing conference.

The only interaction I noticed during my collection of data was the in class group discussion before the writing of the Research Paper assignment. The group discussion was interesting for the purpose of this study and indicates that the participants with the support of the instructor and the SI tutor were trying to promote more interaction among the students in the ESL 101 course. However, these group discussions did not constitute the norm but the exception during my study.

Research in the sociocultural theory of writing and learning suggests that systematic and rich use of language in the classroom supports the acquisition and use of difficult concepts in the learners (Atkinson, 2004, Gee, 1997, Vygotsky, 1978). The richer and more

systematic the use of language to understand difficult concepts in the classroom the better the ability of the learners to use the concepts in meaningful way since clarity leads to a better use of the concepts introduced in the flow of instruction. Even though the instructor attempted to create these learning spaces in the ESL 101 course, these learning spaces were limited to specific writing assignments, the Research Paper, and were not systematically promoted and supported at the time of the study.

The gaps in the teaching and learning of academic writing discussed here have their origins in the pedagogy of the English Department. According to what the instructor told me during my study, the syllabus, the sequence of instruction and its delivery were prescribed and there was not much room for the instructor to vary the format of the ESL 101 course. From the syllabus to the use of the writing rubric, the instructor of the ESL 101 course followed the guidelines and recommendations of the English Department in the way academic writing in the ESL 101 course had to be taught. The pedagogical foundations of the ESL 101 course were deeply embedded in the way the English Department perceived as the best strategy to teach English as L2 to second language writers. In turn, the instructor did not have much room to create a teaching approach in which a richer and more meaningful use of language could promote the acquisition and use of academic writing in English as L2 according to the tenets and research within the sociocultural theory of writing.

### **Future Research**

The study on the acquisition of academic writing in second language writers within a Vygotskian theoretical framework demonstrates the importance of investigating academic writing as a process in which many factors intervene in the acquisition of academic writing as L2 in second language writers. Vygotsky's theoretical framework suggests that academic

writing is a process in which the interdependence of cognitive, individual, and sociocultural or environmental processes plays a crucial role in supporting second language writers to acquire and use academic writing in English.

This study investigated the intersection between the cognitive and sociocultural factors that influenced the acquisition of academic writing in international students and looked at the relationships among these factors as important for the acquisition of academic writing in English as L2. The requirements of the course from the instructor and the English Department, the system of support in the form of SI tutor and CAPS demonstrate the importance to see academic writing in English as L2 as a more complex process in a larger system of learning.

Further research should investigate how this relationship between the L2 academic writer and the environment plays an important role in the acquisition of academic writing as a second language. Future research should look closely at the relationship between class activities; instructor's teaching style and ability to interact with students, materials used in the teaching of academic writing, and students' perceptions of the course and the system of support in place to help them become better writers in academic contexts in English as L2.

If future research focuses on the importance of the learning environment in academic contexts and how this environment is important to support the acquisition of academic writing in English in higher education, researchers have to look at how the different personal characteristics of international students and their interaction with the sociocultural context shapes the acquisition of academic writing to develop a better pedagogy that can support international students in their acquisition and use of academic writing in English as a second language.

I contend that this study is a starting point to apply a Vygotskian theoretical framework to investigate and contribute to the development of a more effective pedagogy in the teaching of academic writing as L2 in higher education. I also maintain that this study can look at the processes of acquiring academic writing in international student from a more systematic perspective where academic writing is seen as a more complex process where linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and individual factors play an important role in how international students are able to acquire and use academic writing in English in higher education in the U.S.

The questions asked at the beginning of the study represent a starting point from where more in-depth investigation of academic writing as L2 can be further carried out. In particular, researchers need to investigate the role of *perezhivanie* as the portal through which they can better understand how cognitive and emotional factors affect the acquisition of academic writing in second language writers in specific learning environments where the process of the acquisition of academic writing takes place. Also, further research should look at how sociocultural and individual differences in second language writers interact with the structure of ESL academic writing courses, as well as how this interaction affects second language writers in their acquisition of academic writing in English as L2.

The key theoretical tenets of this study indicate that academic writing entails emotional and cognitive processes (*perezhivanie*) and social and language factors that interact and influence each other in the acquisition of academic writing in English as L2. These factors form the complex system of acquisition and use of academic writing in English as L2 the participants went through during this study.



I suggest that the problem of the environment as a context of learning and the relationship between the environment and the learner can become the framework to see the acquisition of academic writing in English for international students as the main research agenda for future studies where academic writing as L2 is not seen as just the learning of language rules but the complex and systematic interaction of factors that go beyond the surface structure of language and delve into the cognitive, sociocultural and individual characteristics of the learner.

Another area for future research that this study suggests is to investigate how second language writers acquire academic writing through a conceptual change in the way they perceive, understand, internalize, and use academic writing as L2 as a system of knowledge and communication. Conceptual change indicates a shift or a restructuring of existing knowledge on the part of the learner on specific areas of learning (Vosniadou, Baltas, and Vamvakoussi, 2007). According to Vosniadou et al. (2007) conceptual changes is not merely accumulating new facts or learning a new skill but is changing a conceptual system that drives our view of the world or replaced it with a new conceptual framework.

This study suggests that the acquisition and use of academic writing in English entails a conceptual change in second language writers and the way they acquire and use a new system of knowledge and communication by shifting or changing a system of ideas and meaning from their L1. Future research in the acquisition of academic writing in second language writers should investigate how second language writers change their conceptual framework in the process of acquiring and using academic writing and how the support of the instructor can facilitate or hinder such a process. The conceptual change approach to the acquisition and use of academic writing as L2 promises to unfold the inner processes that

support the acquisition of academic writing in second language writers by analyzing language from a sociocognitive perspective.

This study contributes to support ESL instructors in higher education to become more aware of the needs of international students in the process of acquiring academic writing in English as L2 and can also help ESL instructor to become more aware of the individual differences in culture, learning styles, and ability to connect to the learning environment in international students writing academically in English as L2. The present study gives ESL instructor in higher education an understating of how they can help students become better academic writers in English as L2 by refining their pedagogy in relation to the contexts of learning.

The findings from the present study give ESL instructors the ability to consider multiple aspects when they design instruction in academic writing for international students in higher education in the US. The findings also demonstrates that international students become part of a complex system of learning in which not only the cognitive factors but also the emotional factors play a major role in the acquisition of academic writing in higher education as L2. This study has important implications for ESL instructors in higher education for becoming more culturally sensitive towards their students coming from other countries and studying in US universities and design and implement instruction that strives for teaching academic writing as L2 within a cultural sensitive pedagogy and curriculum.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of the present study and theoretical framework in particular that future research in the acquisition of academic writing as L2 must take into account is how to apply and refine Vygotsky's theory of learning to adult students. Vygotsky's theory

of learning was developed with children and data on how these concepts are adapted for adult learners are limited (Mahn, 1997). This study was an attempt to demonstrate that Vygotsky's theory of learning can significantly contribute to illuminate the cognitive and sociocultural processes of academic writing acquisition and use in a second language.

The findings of the present study represent the starting point of a research into the intersection between the cognitive and the sociocultural aspects for academic writing and how Vygotsky's theoretical framework can pave the way to unfold the complex processes to acquire academic writing in a second language in adult learners. Also, this study is an attempt to propose a framework to reduce the gap between Vygotsky's theory of child development and how this theoretical framework can be applied to adult second language learners acquiring academic writing in higher education. The data analyzed in the present study represent a starting point from where such a line of research can grow and further develop in the attempt to illuminate the cognitive and sociocultural processes of acquiring academic writing in a L2 in adult second language learners.

Another limitation of the present study is the methodology used to collect and analyze data on the acquisition of academic writing in second language writers. Vygotsky's work is rich in theoretical development but lacks a specific methodology that can frame the data according to the theoretical tenets Vygotsky developed during his lifetime. The methodology used comes from case study methodology and qualitative research tradition. Even though they supported the methodological part of the study, their limitations are found in an unbalance toward the external analysis of the data and less toward the cognitive and internal treatment of the data.

The development of a methodology that can analyze Vygotsky's theoretical tenets in the study of the acquisition of academic writing in L2 adult learners is what has to be addressed in future research. This is paramount if we want to capture the interplay between the cognitive and sociocultural, the learning of academic writing as L2 in adult learners in merging of cognitive and sociocultural processes. The construction, application, and development of a methodology to study academic writing as L2 in adult learners within a Vygotskian tradition is paramount to delve into the processes that underpin the acquisition of academic writing in L2 for adult learners.

Vygotsky's theory as applied in this study shows the potential to lead the way in studying academic writing in English as L2 in adult learners at the junction of the cognitive and the sociocultural where the mental processes used to acquire academic writing in L2 in adult learners and the sociocultural environment where the rhetorical and linguistic components are learned will be explained in depth and support teachers in designing, applying and implementing a more systematic pedagogy in the acquisition of academic writing in a second language in adult learners. Vygotsky's theory promises to unpack these processes and inform second language writing pedagogy for future research.

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