NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKING POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON VOCIE IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Dr. Hayat Messekher

School normal superior (ENSB), Bouzaréah, Algiers, Algeria,
hmessekher@yahoo.com

Corresponding author. Messekher Hayat. mail: hmessekher@yahoo.com

ملخص:

يتناول هذا المقال مفهوم الصوت في الكتابة الأكاديمية من خلال دراسة حالة نوعية لستة طلاب دراسات عليا غير الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية حيث هناك اهتمام متزايد بهذا المفهوم الذي يأخذ معان مختلفة في مجتمعات الخطاب عبر المجالات والتخصصات. تظهر نتائج الدراسة أنه على الرغم من أن المشاركين يأتون من خلفيات لغوية وثقافية مختلفة، إلا أنهم يتفقون جميعًا على أن الصوت في الكتابة الأكاديمية مفهوم زلق، ومن الصعب فهمه وإدراكه؛ أنه يتبع عملية يتم التعبير عنه بوضوح وهو في نهاية المطاف لعبة قوة. يتم رسم بعض التداعيات التربوية على أساس نتائج الدراسة المقدمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الصوت، الكتابة الأكاديمية، طلاب دراسات عليا، طلاب غير الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية.

Abstract:

This paper addresses the concept of voice in academic writing through a qualitative case study of six Non-Native English Speaking post-graduate students as there is growing interest in this concept which takes different meanings in discourse communities across fields and disciplines.

The results of the study show that although the participants come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they all agree that voice is a slippery concept, difficult to grasp and realise; it follows a process to be articulated clearly and is ultimately a power play. Pedagogical implications are drawn on the basis of the results of the presented study.

Key words:

Voice, Non-Native English Speaking, Academic Writing, Post-graduate Students

" We know perfectly well that we do not have the right to say everything, that we cannot speak of anything at all in any circumstance whatsoever; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything." Michel Foucault (1970, p. 105)

1. INTRODUCTION:

Entering academia requires postgraduate students, scholars and researchers to conduct research, write it up with the ultimate goal of sharing their concerns, findings, and insights among peers in the discipline-specific discourses in which they are socialized. This is the major venue where scholars and researchers in general can gain an authorial presence in their respective fields. Often, scholars tend to specialize in one particular field or subfield, or at times develop expertise in more than one field or take interdisciplinary approaches. In this paper, I will refer to specialized scholars and researchers as achieved academic writers of research articles (RAs) given that they are published and known and cited in their respective fields, and I will refer to Non-Native English Speaking (henceforth, NNES) postgraduate students as academic writers given that they are writing for scholarly purposes, publishable quality manuscripts as part of their postgraduate studies. Many postgraduate students are striving to publish their research projects well before submitting their theses for defense.

As such then, when academic writers, whether achieved or not, conduct and publish research articles (henceforth, RAs) in their disciplines, they frequently build on their previous research and use insights from their previously published RAs or conducted research even if it has not been published. This can be the case of unpublished theses and dissertations. This may be due to the fact that, as Blanton (1998, p. 221) argues, academic discourse community (ADC) prioritizes writing as a means of communication over any other existing form of communication. Hence, postgraduate students in general are inclined to master academic writing for publication because this is the only means that can help them make their voices heard and get their perspectives and visions out there for the academic discourse community.

Clearly, in the past decades a tendency developed in academia by means of which academic writers have been gaining more authorial presence in their respective fields by using the first-person singular pronoun and self-citations. This is a growing phenomenon in academic writing that shows that discourse communities negotiate their practices. This goes in the same line of thought as Eckert and Wenger (2005, p. 583) who advocate that "[w]hat counts as competence and by whom is something that the community negotiates over time; indeed, it is this negotiation that defines the community." In other words, it is clear by now that discourse communities, and the academic one is no exception, negotiate their discourse practices and the use of the personal pronoun and self-citation is but one example that shows how the author's "voice" is now part of academic writing.

In this paper, informed by Foucault's theory of the production of discourse highlighting the role of inclination and institution whereby the writer has to manoeuvre the personal and the social, the individual and the institutional, I will investigate how NNES postgraduate students negotiate their voice in the academic discourse they produce. Through inclination, the writer "[wishes to enter this risky world of discourse; I want nothing to do with it insofar as it is decisive and final; I would like to feel it all around me, calm and transparent, profound, infinitely open, with others responding to my expectations." In other words, writers would like to have the floor cleared so they can expose their personal inclinations, perspectives, viewpoints and so forth. Yet, on the other opposing side, the institution assures the writer of the roles she can play and which are defined in advance "[y]ou have nothing to fear from launching out; we're here to show you that discourse is within the established order of things" (Foucault, 1982, p. 215-16). In other words, academic writers should follow already set practices of their academic discourse communities in order to be accepted and acknowledged as achieved academic writers and legitimate members of their respective discourse communities. Hence using a Foucauldian perspective, I conducted a survey of six NNES postgraduate students studying in North American universities in order to investigate their perspectives on the concept of "voice" and how they deal with it in their academic writing. More specifically, the aim was to investigate their perceptions of the notion of "voice" in order to identify the foci of their perception and understanding of what "voice" is and analyze them and to also pinpoint, if any, the difficulties they face in writing in the new academic discourse communities they aspire to belong to. Once potential issues related to the problems they may face are identified, the second aim of the study is to briefly attempt to suggest some classroom activities that can be used in teaching how to articulate and negotiate "voice" in a second language writing course. In this paper, I will first provide a literature review on the notion of "voice". Next, I will provide the theoretical framework on which I base the study followed by the study and analysis of the recurrent patterns and consistencies that show how the interviewed NNES postgraduate students perceive "voice", and display their "voice" in their academic writing. Finally, I will attempt to briefly draw some pedagogical implications in relation to "voice" in academic writing.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE CONCEPT OF VOICE:

2.1. Introduction:

Various scholars have studied the notion of "voice" often accompanied with that of "identity" in Second Language Writing (Hyland, 2001, 2004a, 2004b; Matsuda, 2001, Atkinson, 2001, Stapleton, 2001, 2002). The concept of 'voice' is pervasive and slippery in the context of Second Language Writing. It is pervasive in that much discussion revolved around it not only in composition studies and Second Language Writing (SLW), but even in academic writing in general regardless of whether it is in the first language (L1) or second language (L2). Also, it is slippery because it has been given so many definitions that were either personal and individualistic in nature or socially oriented. "Voice" has become some sort of buzz word that is often used with a multitude of meanings. Atkinson (2001), for instance, states that "[l]ike other folk terms in L2 writing and applied linguistics (e.g., *native speaker, critical thinking, standard language, culture*), voice turns out to be an exceedingly complex concept-one which any single treatment can only scratch the surface of" (Atkinson, 2001, p. 107, emphasis in original). Clearly then, as scholars we should consider "voice" carefully, making sure that we assign to it a clear-cut definition depending on whether we are dealing with L1 writing, SLW, or academic writing.

Peter Elbow is one of the authors who is most associated with the concept of voice in the field of composition and much of his claims can be extrapolated to SLW and academic writing as well, although by now there are well established scholars in SLW. Elbow (1998, p. 304) argues that "everyone, however inexperienced or unskilled, has real voice available; everyone can write with power" and that the fact of making mistakes cannot prevent writers from writing using the power of their voice except "[their] fear or unwillingness or lack of familiarity with what I am calling your real voice". In other words, form in writing cannot hinder the articulation of voice in the content of writing. That is why he further advocates that "[r]eal voice is not the sound of an *individual personality* redolent with vibes, it is the sound of a *meaning* resonating because the individual consciousness of the writer is somehow fully behind or in tune with or in participation with that meaning" (Elbow, 1998, p. 311).

However, it is worth noting that Elbow takes a constructivist perspective in defining voice. In freewriting for instance, voice is the characterizing force (Elbow, 1973), and that is why Elbow recommends the use of freewriting because in academic writing we are under the pressure of conforming to the requirements of academic style in order to be validated as professional and prospective published writers. Because in academic writing we use the voices of other writers, this should not erase the power of the writer's own voice. Any piece of writing has a unique

quality that is the writer's voice. Hence, considering and including voices of other authors in our own academic writing may threaten our own voice. Williams (2000) shared such a fear that his own voice had been absorbed by the voices of other validated writers in his field that he referred to as the "institutionalized voices of others". An interesting aspect of Williams' concern is his questioning why his personal stories and lived experiences were considered inappropriate to be included in his well-documented, impersonal research essays during his college years. He testifies that "despite the pages and pages of writing I produced …. I didn't learn anything about honest writing, about where I'd misplaced my voice and why it was absent from all those pages" (Williams, 2000, p. 5). This clearly shows that negotiating one's voice amidst other authorial voices is not an easy task.

On a different tone, Hewett (2004, p. 724) argues that "[v]oice is a bodily metaphor whose essence lies in the act of communication. For better or worse, it's a metaphor based in the world of hearing, a metaphor grounded in the body and the spoken word. It signifies a range of meanings, all interrelated but distinct." Hence, talking from the position of a second language writer and second language writing teacher and teacher educator, I believe that the second language writer's voice is the ultimate result of the negotiation of an original voice in the L1, a developing voice in the L2, positioned under the prism of other authors' voices, that will ultimately and hopefully be reflected in a new hybrid voice. This is how I conceive of voice from a process perspective. Such a voice originates individually, then is negotiated socially, and later academically in a new discourse community. This may explain the recurrent question of whether voice is individual or social. In this vein, whether to consider "voice" as a personal or social construct, Prior (2001) rather argues that "voice" should not be framed solely on "[the] sharp binary of the personal and social". He takes a dialogic approach to "voice", rooted in the work of Voloshinov and Bakhtin. In other words, for Prior (2001), "voice" should be conceived as emerging in the productions of individual writers situated within particular social formations and I would add discourse formations.

The mentioned discussion focuses on voice from a process perspective. However, taking a postprocess perspective to voice, Elbow (1994, 1995b) offers two non-dangerous thoughts and six dangerous thoughts about voice that represent new developments in defining "voice." In the first non-dangerous thought, he juxtaposes "voice" with "discourse," or "text" and claims that the three are metaphors. "When we talk about writing as *voice*, we bring out the fact that it comes from individual persons and from physical bodies. When we talk about writing as *discourse* or *text* we bring out how it comes from the group or the culture or the system rather than from particular people" (Elbow, 1995b, p. 2). In other words, he argues that discourse and text posit that writing emerges from the group or the particular discourse community to which the writer belongs. Hence, members of a discourse

community have a shared system of understandings, meanings, and purpose because there are "commonalities between different people's discourse and the links between discourse and culture" (Elbow, 1995b, p. 2). The second non-dangerous thought is that despite recognizing that voice is a fuzzy and slippery word, he proposes six non-controversial meanings to voice. The "audible voice" that usually expresses a "spoken sound" within the written text as is often the case in poetics; the "dramatic voice" that reveals the "implied author;" the "distinctive, recognizable voice" that gives a distinctive quality to the author's work; the "authoritative voice" that displays the author's "ability or willingness to speak out;" and finally the "resonant voice," that Elbow considers to be dangerous because it relates language to the identity of the writer, thereby revealing the "true self."

The aforementioned thoughts about voice are non-dangerous but there are four dangerous thoughts that have to be carefully considered. The first one is that voice is "the real me, not just the constructed me" because as Elbow (1995b) argues "if we want a fairer society, if we want to empower badly treated persons and groups, we would do well listen for the link between voice and self" (p. 8). Second, we should acknowledge "the importance of the writer's point of view" that should be dominant. He advocates "[to] free composition from privileging the readers' point of view and neglecting the writer's point of view [to be able to] make inferences about the relation between the text and the actual person who wrote it" (Elbow, 1995b, p. 8). The third dangerous thought is "about culture, language, intonation, and body", in that language, intonation and even body are mediated by culture. Elbow contends that "[c]ulture doesn't have <u>complete</u> control and doesn't exert equal force everywhere" (p. 12, emphasis in original). The last dangerous thought is that "anyone can do it." For Elbow (1995b) "[a]nyone can produce writing that captures the attention and interest of readers—without training, without skill, and from the first day of class…. this [does not] happen easily …It requires safety and trust in the classroom and great courage and self-trust in the writer" (p. 17). Clearly, the most revealing thought that stems from Elbow's discussion of voice is that the term "voice" is to be considered beyond the "romantic expressivist ideology." Writers do display "multiple and shifting voices" in their texts and to do so, writers use different linguistic features to articulate their voice in writing.

2.2. How is voice articulated in academic writing?

Voice is believed to enable writers have an authorial presence in their text. It enables them to be recognized within their respective academic discourse community, to be credible and persuasive about the theoretical concepts they are constructing, revising, or criticizing. It also makes readership convinced about the results of the research they have conducted. By looking at which authorial pronouns the writer uses, we can have an overview about the degree of engagement or self-disclosure that the writer wants to display in the academic writing produced.

2.2.1. Authorial pronouns

Academic writing has for a long time been characterized as including "impersonal language". In EFL contexts where SLW still uses a product-oriented instruction, most papers students write for their courses as well as their theses and dissertations use impersonal language. In certain cases, there is no room for using the "I". Second language writers, in so much the same way as L1 writers, have been made conscious and trained to write in the impersonal style following the positivistic tradition based on the myth of the objective observer and researcher. The knowledge discovered is supposed to be pure, acquired through empirical research and reported in academic exposition (Canagarajah, 2002). Hence, academic writing has long been impersonal, including no reference to the writer's individual voice (Webb, 1992). This tradition has been adopted from the hard sciences to the softer sciences. Hyland (2005) explains that:

> In the sciences it is common for writers to downplay their personal role to highlight the phenomena under study, the replicability of research activities, and the generality of the findings, subordinating their own voice to that of unmediated nature. Such a strategy subtly conveys an empiricist ideology that suggests research outcomes would be the same irrespective of the individual conducting it. (Hyland, 2005, p. 180)

He also explains that because

> Soft knowledge disciplines, in contrast, often address the influence of human actions on events. Variables are therefore more varied and causal connections more tenuous. These fields tend to employ synthetic rather than analytic inquiry strategies and exhibit a more reiterative pattern of development with less scope for reproducibility. (Hyland 2004b, p. 93).

Hyland (2001) demonstrated that the extent of the use of personal pronouns differs greatly across disciplines depending on whether it is a hard science or a softer science. Although such large corpus-based studies give insights into the general tendencies across disciplines, idiosyncrasies exist within disciplines.

Regardless of which authorial pronoun to use, writers strive to create their own ethos, i.e. they establish their credibility and at the same time they have to take into consideration their readership pathos, i.e. the readers' attitudes and reactions to the arguments the writer makes. Citation, interaction and self-mention "are all important realizations of the research writer's concern for audience" (Hyland, 2004b, p. 89).

Depending on the choice to use or not to use personal pronouns, academic writers make the choice to "explicitly intrude into their discourses to assert their personal involvement and professional credibility" (Hyland, 2004b, p. 120). However, given that academic writers use others' work and contributions by citing them and referring to their contribution, they have to negotiate their own claims with those of the researchers they cite and be keen to "display their disciplinary competence, but also help ensure that readers recognize their *individual contribution* and their assertion of *academic priority*" (Hyland, 2004b, p. 120, emphasis in original). If writers can balance *individual contribution* with *academic priority*, then they will overcome the fear Williams (2000) describes, i.e. the fear of having one's own voice absorbed by the institutionally or academically legitimized voices of others.

2.2.2. Self-mention

When writers self-mention themselves, this helps them construct their identity as knowledgeable members of their discourse community and disciplinary field. Ultimately, self-mentions ''are related to the desire to present oneself as an informed and reliable colleague, strongly identifying oneself with a particular view to gain credit for one's individual perspective or research decisions" (Hyland, 2004a, p. 106). Furthermore, Hyland (2005, p. 181) states that:

> [i]n the humanities and social sciences, in contrast, the use of the first person is closely related to the desire to both strongly identify oneself with a particular argument and to gain credit for an individual perspective. Personal reference is a clear indication of the perspective from which a statement should be interpreted, enabling writers to emphasize their own contribution to the field and to seek agreement for it.

Yet, Hyland (2005, p. 181) argues that the creation of an authorial persona should be a matter of personal choice. Academic writers should make their own choice of how and by what means to incorporate their own voice in their writing. He also acknowledges the role writer's "influence of individual personality, confidence, experience, and ideological preference" play in the authorial persona the writer creates for herself. On the other hand, Clark and Ivanič (1997, p. 136) argue that "writer's identities are socially constructed through the possibilities for self-hood, the 'subject-positions', that are available to them, and that this availability is socially constrained". In other words, according to Ivanič (1998), writer's identity construction depends first on ''the autobiographical self'', i.e. "their autobiography up to that moment." Second, ''the discoursal self'', i.e. "a particular representation of self through the practices and discourses they enter into as they write''. And lastly ''the self as author'', i.e. "how they establish their authority and authorial presence within a piece of writing" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 136).

One way of establishing authorial presence in one's writing is by using self-mentions if the author has already published. Self-mentions enable authors to promote themselves as knowledgeable and legitimate members of their academic discourse community in their respective fields. Second language writers and especially graduate students/researchers should gain a clear understanding of the practices or techniques they can use to express their personal positions in academic writing they will be sharing with their prospective readers (Moodie, 1994), or they can include their personal and lived experiences in their academic writing by theorizing it.

Amazingly enough, regardless of the existing literature that explains how the humanities have adopted an impersonal style from the hard sciences to achieve objectivity, lack or inexistence of an authorial voice in second language writers' texts has often been attributed to their original, at times, collectivist societies and cultures. More specifically, it was attributed to their non-individualistic societies (Atkinson, 1997; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). This presupposes an enculturation for second language writers in order to develop an individualized voice in their writing. However, other cultures despite being collectivist in essence, their writers do possess and display their own voice (Kachru, 1986). Languages, then, have their own meaning-making of voice, articulate it differently, and value it differently. The second language writer has to be made conscious of these differences when they exist and be prepared to employ the necessary techniques to achieve voice provided, she seeks to do so (Hyland, 2004b).

One last issue in relation to voice under the aforementioned intercultural rhetoric dimension is inherent in Seloni's (2008) study on doctoral students' textual construction of academic writing including voice. In her analysis of multilingual multiliterate doctoral students' discussion of the literature review genre in academic writing in English, Seloni (2008) showed that those doctoral students tackled literature review in two parts when it comes to considering voice. First, they include other scholar's voices and in the second part, they are expected to put in their own voice but incorporating their own opinion. Clearly, Seloni's participants had to adhere to the requirements of academic writing, but they had to negotiate their positionality in their textual constructions. This study shows "students' struggles and their attempts to appropriate literacy practices" (Seloni, 2008, p. 82), and so is developing one's voice in academic writing.

To avoid silencing the voices of academic writers even before they start to be articulated, we need to look at how postgraduate students from different cultural backgrounds (NNES students that are also international students) perceive voice and construct it. This is the target group I am focusing on in this study because most of them come from Expanding Circle countries and have to be socialized in their new discourse communities in North American universities. Reviewing the existing literature on voice shows that this concept is multidimensional, developmental and slippery.

In the next section, I will succinctly present the theoretical framework I will be adopting in the study, followed by the methodology.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FOUCAULT'S THEORY OF INCLINATION AND INSTITUTION

In fact, it seems like there is a game the writer has to play. This is the "game of the truth" that Foucault (1982) refers to. This is similar to the "writing games" (Casanave, 1995 cited in Seloni, 2008, p. 65) describes whereby students "learn how to participate skilfully and flexibly in the academic writing games" (p. 65). Informed by Foucault's "game of the truth", I consider voice as the negotiation between *inclination* and *institution* by the writer. In *inclination*, the writer has access to an unlimited expressivist discourse that is considered "calm and transparent, profound, infinitely open, with others responding to [her] expectations", while the word *institution* suggests a writer with a limited restrictive access to an academic discourse. In such academic discourse, the role the writer plays is predetermined by speech itself. In other words, *institution* can be linguistic, in that the L2 itself imposes some constraints on L2 users, and/or academic in that disciplines constrain what can be said and how. Thus, the writer has to manoeuver inclination and institution, the personal and the social, the individual and the institutional. Through inclination, the writer "wishes to enter this risky world of discourse". Navigating

inclination and institution is often problematic for the writer. When negotiating the interface between the two, the writer will create her "voice". This is the notion of "voice" that I will be adopting in the study. "Voice", then, will be conceptualized as a transgression of what the institution often expects.

However, even if I consider voice as a transgression of institutional expectations, it is in essence based on the articulation of an experiential language event in which the author engages and in which other writers have already engaged or are engaging in articulating similar language events, makes voice participatory and dialogic in essence. This is the view held by Bakhtin (1981, 1984), and Foucault (1972). Foucault argues that there are many systems of exclusion that constrain the writer. In the case of the second language writer, I can cite the underlying cultural assumptions that she may not be knowledgeable about or accustomed to, the writing (institutional) conventions of academic discourse for instance which are inherent in the second language and which may not be present in her L1. These, then, can be discursive constraints inherent in the language itself, and hence are part of the discourse community and culture in which the second language writer has been socialized in or may simply be realized differently (Seloni, 2008).

3. RESEARCH METHOD:

4.1. The study:

The case study reported here is a small-scale study that explores NNES postgraduate students' conceptions and practices of voice in academic writing. I interviewed six students at an American University about what voice in academic writing meant to them, whether they consider they have a voice typical to them and whether they are / are not encouraged to express their voice(s) and what challenges they face in such endeavour.

This case study is a qualitative study by means of which I do not aim to generalize from its findings although my participants are from different Expanding Circle Countries and from different linguistic backgrounds. Rather, I aim at exploring students' perceptions and practices of articulating voice in academic writing as members of a new discourse community while expanding our understanding of voice in SLW in general as well.

4.2. Participants and data collection procedure:

The participants in this case study are six NNES postgraduate students pursuing M.A. TESOL programs or Ph.D. programs at an American University. They are all second language users and writers. They all learned English as a foreign language (EFL). Four of them exercised from four to twenty-six years as EFL instructors and taught writing courses. One participant from Russia has been teaching EFL part-time for eight years in an intervention program of special

education in high school. The participants were Natasha and Sarah, Ph.D. candidates in literature; Naim and Nelson, M.A. students in English; Ahmed and Zaki, Ph.D. candidates in Composition and TESOL. These participants were chosen because they all belong to Expanding Circle Countries, respectively Russia, Algeria, Egypt, Armenia, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. The Ph.D. candidates have all written an M.A. thesis in English related topics whether it is literature, translation, or English Language Teaching in general. The M.A. students too have written memoires (lengthy research papers) as part of their English undergraduate degrees in their respective countries. Three of them have already published at least one article and have already presented in many conferences. As part of the requirements of their academic programs, they are constantly writing research papers of publishable quality in the different courses they take. They also conduct small-scale research, write reflective and response papers, and respond in writing in their personal and class blogs. As such then, they are highly involved in academic writing.

For ethical considerations, before I started this study, I scheduled a participants' debriefing session. During this session, I provided a brief description of my research topic, its goal, and its possible benefits both to the participants themselves as well as to SLW courses. To ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality, I assured them that no information that might help identify them will be disclosed and that I will keep all the interviews confidential by using pseudonyms and storing the digital and transcribed interviews in my personal locked computer.

Each participant was interviewed for about half an hour at least. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. Some participants contacted me later by email to share with me some aspects they said they did not think of while being interviewed. After the interview, two of them requested a meeting with me whereby they shared other concerns and thoughts that might help give a better understanding of the issue under investigation from their perspective. Hence, data from the initial interview and the requested follow-up interviews were analysed to uncover the tacit dynamics between participants' inclinations and the institutions requirements and constraints at work in the participants' reported experiences.

The transcribed interviews were analysed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) whereby I summarized the recurrent emerging patterns, coded them, and then compared them across similar incidents in the same category. A special focus was put on the patterns' ideological, personal and institutional conditions, and the words they were employing because, as Fairclough (1989) argues, the words used are revealing in characterizing, sensitizing, and/or intensifying any exchange. This analysis will later be used to draw some suggestions on academic writing in SLW.

4.3. Results and Discussion:

The results that the NNES postgraduate students' interviews yielded have been classified in three main themes that highlight how these students perceived voice, define it, articulate it in their academic writing, and how they fair about it.

4.3.1. Voice: A slippery construct

One of the recurrent themes in the interviews on voice in academic writing was that voice is a slippery construct. Each participant had his/her own definition of voice in relation not only to academic writing but also to disciplines. This highlights Atkinson's (2001) argument that the concept and, hence, term of voice has been used and at times abused as many other buzz words or "folk terms in L2 writing and applied linguistics" (p. 107). Although on average, most participants agreed that whatever claim they make in their academic writing should be backed up from the literature in order to have recognition as an academic discourse. Natasha, the literature major believes that voice means she "should have a personal take on a topic. …in literature, it is to have your own original analysis, what is new about your paper … what are you bringing into this discussion." In other words, for her voice is tied to the idea of originality which she thinks is very difficult to achieve especially when dealing with topics that have been studied for decades in literature. So, writing an original piece that puts forward an original argument is an example of a good piece of academic writing where the writer's voice would be articulated according to Natasha.

For Ahmed, no particular definition of voice is satisfactory because scholars often deal with voice as a generic construct that applies roughly equally to all disciplines and in writing regardless of whether it is L1 writing or SLW. "Some have written about voice as something that is there, whether the writer is a native speaker, or ESL, writing in composition, TESOL, or literature". He argues that:

> "In fact, I've come across so many definitions of voice and none of them really touches on all the aspects of voice. For me voice is in every sentence of your paper. It's not something you can realize by one or two sentences or even by one paragraph. Sometimes you can read something and it sounds too critical but without having the word critical. So, voice doesn't show in the words used but rather the style. …Also, I leave it up to the subject to control my voice. If I'm passionate about a topic, the intensity of the topic controls the voice."

(Ahmed's interview)

Also, Naim believes that voice is closely related to identity. More specifically, when writing, one adopts a persona that is dictated by the topic and the readership. Displaying an appropriate voice is a matter of legitimacy. For Naim, it is all about:

> "How can I legitimize myself to my audience through the voice I put in my writing. This does not mean that I give up my identity while I'm writing. No, I'm keeping my identity but I'm finding a way to make myself legitimate to the readers who are going to read my piece".

<div align="right">(Naim's interview)</div>

In other words, Naim conceives of voice as the different personae that the writer constructs regardless of his/her identity. This is similar to Natasha's idea that the voice she puts in a piece of writing varies according to the topic and the audience. She states that when she writes "it's like a mask that I put and then start writing behind this mask. Each time it depends on who I am writing to. I do not possess a single voice." This is in line with Foucault's rejection of self and identity as being fixed. The self is defined and negotiated constantly through the ongoing and shifting discourse one has in relation to others. Hence, this explains Natasha's idea of voice as a panoply of masks she wears when she is composing. Hence, "[t]he notion of voice captures this discursive process of consciously selecting, juxtaposing, or reworking existing social roles and identities [and academic positions] in the representation of self and other." (Lam, 2000, p. 461)

4.3.2. Articulating a critical voice:

Another recurrent definition of voice in academic writing is that it is all about building a case that is an expression of personal opinion and supporting it by research and literature once one has read, critically analysed what other established scholars have said on a given topic; then formulate his/her own opinion on the topic, then writes it down in the fashion accepted by the respective discourse community of the discipline. This is what Sarah explains. For her, voice is:

> "to provide strong evidence to support [her] argument. Because even if my idea is convincing to me, nobody thinks it's strong without any convincing evidence and details. And those details and evidences are from the literature basically. We need to read a lot and select some important information and insight from the literature and especially in this American academia it's very important." (Sarah's interview).

A similar view was expressed by Zaki, the Ph.D. candidate in Composition and TESOL. He defined voice in relation to a specific genre, namely the literature review although adopting a low profile in his presence in the literature review. He stated that:

> "[his] voice as an academic writer starts from the lit review of whatever paper I'm writing. I don't have to accept all the ideas that I'm collecting in the lit review but I have to criticize them as to formal content. How they were presented and what they were about and try to jump in and work on the ideas. And this is a little bit in a quite a hidden fashion. It doesn't have to be prominent, but I just shed light on each and every writer in the lit review in comparison to other writers". (Zaki's interview)

In a review of what constitutes academic writing and what its standards are, Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) identify three major characteristics. These are "[a] clear evidence in writing that the writer(s) have been persistent, open-minded, and disciplined in study, [t]he dominance of reason over emotion or sensual perception, [a]n imagined reader who is coolly rational, reading for information, and intending to formulate a reasoned response" (Thaiss and Zawacki, 2006, p. 5-6) . These characteristics were clearly articulated in Sarah's description. She argues that:

> "while I'm working on an academic paper, voice for me would be critical analysis, the ability to put different points of view together, and come out with a synthesis of those opinions, that's while I'm working on an academic paper. But if you ask me to write my opinion on a movie I've seen, voice would be adding my personal emotions and feelings about certain things. So, it depends on the kind of writing I'm writing. Like within academic writing it would be to choose this person or that person, and come out with a conclusion, and be able to compare it to somebody else. (Sarah's interview)

Both Zaki and Sarah had a clear understanding of how articulating one's critical voice in academic writing, especially in the literature review, proceeds. In fact, academic writing is all about making an argument that expresses a scholar's point of view on a subject or issue while supporting it with evidence from theories and empirical studies whenever available and appropriate.

4.3.3. Voice: An issue of power:

Displaying one's voice is part of "playing the game" in order to legitimatize oneself as a writer. Here the student shuttles in between two planes. One has to do with the immediate academic community where the student is, i.e. the local academic institution, and the other one is the overall academic community. In both communities there is a power play. In the first one, the teacher is the ultimate authority and in the latter the established scholars who often serve as reviewers, or peer and blind reviewers in journals, are the ones who decide what topics are up-to-date, deserve to be published and shared, and enter the academic conversation of the discourse community. Many of the best academic writing papers that postgraduate students and scholars write often stem from the critical work of scholars who dare to *trespass* the establishment and form the seminal works of the field. Likewise, the graduate students interviewed stressed the fact that to have their voice heard in their academic writing, they often select research topics they are passionate about.

For Nelson, one of the M.A. students in TESOL, when it comes to consider voice in academic writing in the United Sates, there is an interesting issue to mention. Although he feels there is a power play when he writes vis-à-vis his professors, he still feels the TESOL program he is attending empowered him and led him to deal with many critical topics related to academic and literacy issues in his home country. He states that "when writing, part of my audience or rather my primary audience is my professor. So, I have to always keep this in mind in terms of the claims I make and positions I take". Later, he added that:

> "One important issue though is that professors in this program encourage us and push us to be really critical. They want us to think 'out of the box', not to accept things for granted just because they are published. I think this is very important because at the beginning I would always think who I am to criticize those big names. I am just a graduate student and even more a second language learner." (Nelson's interview)

Similarly, for Naim writing on topics that are critical means "negotiating your position in an academic piece of writing and articulating your voice freely is a matter of negotiating this unbalanced relationship of power between me as a student and my professor". In this particular instance, it is clear that the NNES postgraduate or second language writer has to negotiate this power play between, what Foucault refers to as, inclination and institution. In this case, the institution is incarnated by the professor that the student has to deal with in so much the same way as Nelson considering his professor to be his primary audience.

A similar view was also expressed by Sarah.

> "Sometimes we do write for the professor's style even if you aren't convinced with that style. You do know through feedback what that person appreciates as good academic writing and unfortunately you tend to write for that purpose not for the quality of the writing itself even if you disagree and that's a pity in itself but that's the reality."(Sarah's interview)

Displaying her personal inclination and the institutional constraint that the professor embodies, Sarah demonstrates an awareness of the negotiation she makes in her academic writing. This also might imply that the way her negotiation proceeds will depend on the context where she is writing. Hence, if she is writing for a course, the professor incarnates the institution. Also, if she is writing for a journal, the editors or reviewers will be the institution with which she will have to negotiate her position and stance with.

Another institutional constraint is not in terms of the requirements of the discourse community, but in terms of the linguistic constraints that the NNES postgraduate second language writer might at times encounter.

> "I am just a post-graduate student and even more a second language learner. Sometimes, I have ideas that I can picture in my head but will not be able to find the words and the linguistic structures to express them. If I were to use my L1, I would express my ideas in a better and eloquent way." (Nelson's interview)

These were Nelson's concerns in terms of L2 constraining his expression. They are more of a technical rather than conceptual nature. In other words, the negotiation of inclination and institution takes place on many levels. These include a wide range of planes, discursive, academic discourse communities; linguistic, L2 competency; and institutional, local academic institution represented by the teacher.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION:

In this study, the participants had an opportunity to express their conceptions of voice in academic writing freely. They shed light on various aspects of voice that I will attempt to utilize in order to draw some pedagogical implications for academic writing courses or SLW courses.

First, it might be useful for the writing instructor to try to come up with a definition or conceptualization of voice in various genres and in various subjects or disciplines. For instance, the teacher can set workshops where the class would try to come up with a definition of voice in literature, composition and TESOL, political science, business, etc. Students should come to realize that voice in writing and writing itself changes and that the writer accommodates his/her audience bearing in mind the subject in particular and the discipline in general.

Second, academic writing is not just a matter of echoing other scholars. Students should understand that they have a certain agency and that power is not possessed by the teacher but exercised (Foucault, 1982). It can be exercised by the teacher as well as the students. Students in academic writing should exercise power by grasping the literature and the scholarship done in their respective fields. By being knowledgeable, they can formulate strong claims that are well grounded in theory and practice, and that the teacher can only appreciate.

Third, teachers should instruct students, especially those coming from contexts where writing instruction is still product-oriented, to keep in mind that writing is a process. As such then, any piece of writing they compose is work in progress. It needs the teacher's feedback, the peers' feedback, and the writer's revision. Besides, the writer's voice itself is not static. It is dynamic and shifting. To illustrate this, the teacher can select published works from the field's literature to show the growth, development, maturity or change of scholars' voice in academic writing. Fields change, evolve, merge, etc, and hence voices might change and evolve as well.

5. CONCLUSION:

My central concern in this paper has been exploratory, to attempt to uncover NNES postgraduate students' conceptions of voice, its definition and realization. Although the participants had some difficulty defining voice in academic writing, they were very successful in demonstrating an articulate description of how they realize it. This was especially the case when considering the specific genre of the literature review. They were all cognizant of what articulating one's voice in academic writing entails.

They understand that they are entering a scholarly conversation. They have to read scholarly work, analyse it, critique it, synthesize it, and take a position vis-a-vis it. They have to formulate a personal opinion and to make an argument to sustain this opinion. Reading scholarship helps them hear other voices and generate their own. By reading established and institutionalized scholars, they are not obliged to echo their voices if they do not align with them. On the contrary, they should leave their own voice emerge and generate new positions, arguments and directions to lead their respective fields further.

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