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Negotiated interaction in the learning of written discourse conventions

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NEGOTIATED INTERACTION IN THE LEARNING OF WRITTEN DISCOURSE CONVENTIONS

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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NEGOTIATED INTERACTION IN THE LEARNING OF WRITTEN DISCOURSE
CONVENTIONS

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of
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Brian A. Guthrie

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of
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	vii
CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM OF CONTEXT IN WRITING PEDAGOGY	1
1. Context in Writing Pedagogy.....	2
2. Non-Deterministic Accounts of Writing	5
3. Context from the Bottom Up.....	7
4. Overview of Chapters.....	13
CHAPTER 2: FOUNDATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE LEARNING OF WRITTEN DISCOURSE CONVENTIONS	14
1. Critiques of Top-down Orientations to Written Discourse Conventions	14
1.1.Critiques of Cultural Rhetorics	15
1.2 Critiques of Discourse Communities.....	17
2. Ecological Approaches to Writing as Alternatives to Top-down Approaches	19
3. Interaction through Joint Attention, Alignment, and Trajectories of Experience	25
3.1 Joint Attention in Learning Written Discourse Conventions	26
3.2 Alignment in Learning Written Discourse Conventions	30
3.3 Trajectories of Experience in Learning Written Discourse Conventions	32
4. Written Discourse Conventions as Independent Objects.....	34
4.1 Concepts into Objects	35
4.2 Practice into Concepts	38
5. Weight of Authority in Alignment to Written Discourse Conventions	40
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	46
1. Evolution of the Research Project.....	46

	Page
1.1 Early Focus and Interests.....	46
1.2 Securing a Research Site and Changing Focus.....	49
2. Setting and Participants.....	52
2.1 Setting.....	52
2.2 Participants	54
2.2.1 Harumi	54
2.2.2 Nao.....	57
3. Data Collection	59
3.1 Textual Data Collected	60
3.2 Interviews with Student-Participants.....	62
4. Analyzing the Data	63
4.1 Approach to Data Analysis.....	63
4.2 Coding the Data	67
CHAPTER 4: VARIATIONS IN THE PRESENTATION OF ACADEMIC	
INTRODUCTIONS.....	70
1. Thesis Statements.....	71
1.1 Inclusion of Thesis Statements in Introductions.....	72
1.1.1 Inclusion of Thesis Statements in <i>Sourcework</i>	72
1.1.2 Inclusion of Thesis Statements in <i>Developing Skills for the</i>	
<i>TOEFL iBT</i>	73
1.1.3 Inclusion of Thesis Statements in Instructor Feedback	75
1.1.4 Inclusion of Thesis Statements in Assigned Readings	75
1.2 Specificity of the Thesis Statement	76
1.2.1 Specificity in <i>Sourcework</i>	76
1.2.2 Specificity in <i>Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT</i>	77
1.2.3 Specificity in Instructor Feedback	78
1.3 Acceptability of "There Exist (Number) Reasons" Thesis	81
2. Acceptability of a "Will Do" Statement.....	82

2.1 "Will Do" Statements in Handouts and Feedback from Instructors	83
2.2 "Will Do" Statements in Assigned Readings.....	84
3. Inclusion of Hooks.....	85
4. Contrastive Statements.....	86
CHAPTER 5: STUDENT PERCEPTION AND NEGOTIATION OF DISCONTINUITIES IN LEARNING TO WRITE INTRODUCTIONS	90
1. Nao: Aligning with Authority	90
2. Harumi: Emerging Audience Awareness and Cooper's Dispositional Influence	94
2.1 Harumi's Emerging Audience Awareness	94
2.2 Harumi and Dispositional Influence	97
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS	103
1. Variation in Introductions	103
2. Learning Introductions through Interaction and Joint Attention	105
2.1 Joint Attention through Triadic Interaction	106
2.2 Implicit Learning of Features of Introductions.....	107
2.3 Trajectories of Experience in Learning Introductions	108
2.4 Alignment and Weight of Authority in Learning Introductions	110
3. Negotiation in Learning Introductions.....	112
4. Pedagogical Implications	113
4.1 Students as Architects.....	114
4.2 Content-Emergent Classrooms and Student Engagement	116
REFERENCES	121
VITA.....	133

ABSTRACT

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This study examines how two Japanese students learning to write in English negotiate the variations in written discourse conventions they encounter in an all-English program at a university in Japan. Textbooks, samples of the students' essays, and written feedback from instructors were analyzed, and interviews were conducted with the students in order to demonstrate the varieties of descriptions and interpretations of written academic introductions the students encountered in their first year of study at the university. Using an approach to learning that draws from ecological theories of composition, alternative approaches to second language acquisition, and actor-network theory, the students' academic enculturation is viewed from the bottom-up, through their local interactions with source materials. Looking at the students interacting with variations in descriptions and interpretations of academic introductions with degrees of alignment to different sources and their own preferences, the learning of academic literacy practices is viewed as more than a linear transfer of knowledge and more as an interactive negotiation of varieties of ways of knowing written discourse conventions that the students encounter over time.

CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM OF CONTEXT IN WRITING PEDAGOGY

Written discourse conventions lead dual lives, in that they are both hidden and overt. We engage with various written discourse conventions without conscious attention (Atkinson, 1991), much as we do when speaking our native language. However, like we do with spoken language, we can attempt to abstract rules and descriptions from these practices through examination of print materials and through the descriptions of those who create and use them (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

Written discourse conventions are often thought to emerge from a uniform context, though there are variations in how contexts are circumscribed and categorized. From this perspective, sources of academic literacy, such as instructors, writing textbooks, and other reading materials, convey ways of knowing and writing discourse conventions in a more or less uniform manner to the learner. Much work has gone into describing, sorting, and categorizing academic writing, beginning with early descriptions in current-traditional rhetoric (Berlin & Inkster, 1980) and modes of discourse (Connors, 1981), through genre studies (e.g., Swales, 1990). However, pinning down these writing practices has been elusive, as they have been shown to vary depending upon the particular context, and evolve with changing institutional and technological influences (Atkinson, 1999a; Bazerman, 1981, 1988).

Different orientations to the connection between written discourse conventions and context has led to different pedagogical approaches to writing. In this chapter, I will first give an overview of pedagogical approaches that have developed in relation to contextualized writing practices. Then, I will briefly review studies that have problematized student learning in context. Finally, I will introduce an alternative view of written discourse conventions based on a bottom-up orientation to context, and give an overview of the chapters that follow.

1. Context in Writing Pedagogy

Context became emphasized as determinative of writing conventions when social constructivist orientations were adopted in L1 writing pedagogy. Previously, written discourse conventions had been taught as universal types that could be applied in a variety of different contexts, as in the current-traditional and modes of discourse approaches to writing pedagogy (Berlin, 1982; Connors, 1981; Fulkerson, 1979, 1990, 2005). These approaches taught written discourse conventions as "proper" forms of "good writing." However, dissatisfied with the lack of freedom and creativity these approaches offered, an *expressivist* approach was developed (e.g., Elbow, 1968; Murray, 1969, 2003) which encouraged writers to be creative, unique, and "true" to their own sense of self. The task of the writer was to dig deep into what might be hidden from conscious awareness within themselves and draw out original and creative ideas into their writing in terms of both form and content. However, it was recognized that in many cases learners were not properly prepared for the demands of academic writing. Bartholomae (1985/2003) explained the problem as follows:

[The student writer] has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other hand. He must learn to speak our language. (p. 624)

Bartholomae here represents a larger movement in L1 composition studies in the 1980s. Tied with social constructivism, this movement took the view that knowledge was not universal but was instead situated within particular communities (e.g., Bruffee, 1986; Trimbur, 1994). Bruffee (1986) wrote,

Social construction assumes that the matrix of thought is not the individual self but some community of knowledgeable peers and the vernacular language of that community. That is, social construction understands knowledge and the authority of knowledge as community-generated, community-maintaining symbolic artifacts. (p. 777)

A corollary to this relationship between knowledge and reality was that knowledge was embedded within the symbolic systems of a community, as Bruffee (1986) explained in his discussion of the relevance of Thomas Kuhn's work to writing studies: "Knowledge is identical with the symbol system (i.e., the language) in which it is formulated" (p. 779). Thus, the task of the writing instructor was not to teach abstracted universal forms, as in current-traditional rhetoric, because there was no sense in which these forms could be universal. Furthermore, the expressivist emphasis on the creativity and freedom of the writer was criticized, because the writer also could not take an objective position of freedom outside of the forms of discourse of their community (e.g., Berlin, 1982, 1988, 1992; Faigley, 1993). Instead, the task of the writing instructor was to teach the specific forms and ways of knowing of particular communities, as Santos (1992) explained:

Speech and writing are seen as social constructs, the users of which are members of discourse communities in which form and function are understood and valued, with newcomers to the community needing to be initiated into the particular discourse prevailing within it. (p. 4)

This social turn in writing studies led to a view of community as determinative of both knowledge and writing practices. From this social constructivist orientation, two forms of pedagogy were developed--one based on critique, and one based on preparing students to enter more or less specific discourse communities. Critique-based pedagogies argued that students needed to be aware of the situatedness of the knowledge and values of communities, as well as how their own beliefs were culturally constructed (e.g., Benesch, 1996; Berlin, 1988, 1992; Faigley, 1993; Pennycook, 1997; Sidler & Morris, 1998; Vandrick, 1995). As Pennycook (1997) wrote,

A curricular focus on providing students with only academic-linguistic skills for dealing with academic work in other disciplines misses a crucial opportunity to help students to develop forms of linguistic, social and cultural criticism that would be of much greater benefit to them for understanding and questioning how language works both within and outside educational institutions. (p. 263)

However, a much more popular approach was to attempt to prepare students for the forms of writing and the kinds of evidence that were used to establish and exchange knowledge in particular communities, which resulted in genre-based pedagogies.¹ In genre-based pedagogies, students were taught written discourse conventions such as those that could be found in a corpus of texts taken from a discourse community (e.g., Hyland, 2004; Swales, 1990), or they were taught strategies to analyze a given discourse community's genres (e.g., Johns, 1997). In Australia, Systemic Functional Linguistics

¹ Critics of pedagogical approaches to genre argued that situated writing practices could not be taught out of context, and therefore could not be taught in the classroom (e.g., Freedman, 1999). Nevertheless, these pedagogies remained popular.

(e.g., Coffin, 2000, 2001; Macken-Horarik, 2002; Martin, 1997, 2001; Martin & Rose, 2003, 2008) followed the tradition of text analysis of genres, using the particular methodological framework of field, tenor, and mode to determine the rhetorical, interpersonal, and linguistic features respectively of various academic disciplines. The purpose of SFL was to reveal typical genre forms as they manifested in textbooks so that these forms could be passed on to learners, particularly at the K-12 level.

2. Non-Deterministic Accounts of Writing

While there was acknowledgement of genres changing over time, most genre-based research and pedagogies took a determinative view of context through communities. That is, writers and learners did not engage with the written discourse conventions of a community in a creative or transformative way, but instead reproduced the forms they encountered, with the community determining the ways of knowing and communicating unidirectionally. However, several non-deterministic accounts of writing emerged which gave a fuller description of writers dealing with community conventions not merely by adopting the conventions but by engaging with and negotiating them in different ways. For example, Casanave (2002) described the struggles a new graduate student in sociology had with adopting the quantitative methodology and orientation of the discipline as it was practiced in her university. The genres the student was asked to write required her to use statistical methods and present information using particular logical procedures, which the student resisted. Similarly, Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman (1988) described how a new graduate student in a rhetoric program clashed with its objective, scientific approach, preferring to write in a more expressivist style.

Prior (1991, 1997, 1998) gave a complex view of writers crossing disciplinary boundaries, mixing conventions and practices across contexts. He described how Lilah, a graduate student, aligned with the ethnographic practices she learned in an American studies seminar and applied them to a research paper for an immigration history seminar, against the latter professor's wishes. Another student in the same American studies class with a background in history used a historical method for his final research paper, once again against the professor's preference for a focus on ethno-geographic development (the professor himself was originally in the field of geography). Yet another student changed his idea for a sociology research project based on technological constraints and the advice of his classmates. In these examples, Prior showed writers aligning to or resisting community conventions, and creatively reworking writing conventions and practices by mixing those of different areas. Similarly, Roozen's (2009) study of an undergraduate student followed her progress through the university, noting how she brought the practices of her private writing into her composition classes and journalism classes, creating a mix of her own style and the practices learned in class. Canagarajah (2002, 2006) described writers mixing writing conventions from a World Englishes perspective, noting how professional multilingual writers not only adapted their rhetorical styles to particular audiences, but also mixed practices to create forms of writing that were a blend of different cultural rhetorics. These non-deterministic accounts of writers interacting with community conventions give an image of individual agency within communities that was not fully accounted for in social constructivist orientations.

3. Context from the Bottom Up

Accounts of written discourse conventions have tended to either present conventions as universal forms of "good writing," or have presented them as uncontested forms within a particular community or other bounded context, such as culture. While a degree of variation and change is alluded to in these accounts, for the most part there is an emphasis on a top-down view of context, with conventions passed uniformly on to newcomers. Within a community, there appears to be an assumption that the writing practices are agreed upon by everyone. Given particular goals and means to reach those goals, there seems to be a general agreement on how to correctly reach that goal. An apprentice in this context simply has to learn the correct way of reaching that goal, which involves consulting with experts in the community who train them in appropriate ways of knowing and doing (Lave & Wenger, 1991). There is an underlying pragmatic assumption that there is one correct way of doing things, and failure to do things this way is a reflection of breakdown and misunderstanding (e.g., Spinuzzi, 2003). Non-deterministic accounts of learners entering communities give a sense of agency to the writer, who does not simply adopt conventions in a one-directional manner. However, these accounts tend to focus on the newcomer as an agent of change.

Another way of looking at context is to see "good writing" in any particular context as continually contested and negotiated. Li (1996) in her study of perceptions of good writing among writing instructors in China and the U.S. found that views of good writing not only differed between cultures but also within each culture. While it is intuitively understood that members of discourse communities have individual understandings and interpretations of practices and local knowledge, these differences

tend to be effaced. Instead of focusing on shared understanding, I will look to variation as an inherent condition of the way writing practices are known. When a newcomer enters a community he or she learns the ways of knowing or doing of the community, but this understanding is never complete, because practices are understood differently in interaction with different sets of members. Members of an interaction can include individuals as well as the tools they use (and the textbooks they refer to). Members can share understandings, but these agreements can be disrupted by the entrance of a new member. For example, a measuring device may allow a scientist to understand a physical phenomena in a particular way, but this way of understanding can be disrupted by changes in the device, the entrance of a new device, or the entrance of anomalies into the measuring field. For research on written discourse conventions, while norms exist, the stability of these norms and how they are understood are contingent upon the particular configuration of members, with different members bringing the possibility of new interpretations of these norms. A different textbook or instructor might add a slight variation in their descriptions of a convention, or a new technology or publishing practice might lead to changes in how the convention is formed.

In this study, I will take a bottom-up approach to understanding contextual norms, examining how norms are reproduced or altered through local interactions (Atkinson & Sohn, 2013; Scollon, 2001). In this I draw from the work of Goodwin (2000, 2007) and Keller & Keller (1996), who showed how patterns and routines are reproduced through coordinated local interaction with the environment. Goodwin (2000) described how individuals use objects in the environment to create participation frameworks, from which coordinated interaction and routines emerge. In one example, two young girls in a

street game of hopscotch used gaze, gesture, a grid drawn in chalk on the sidewalk, and stone markers to mutually orient each other to a framework for action. Once this framework was established, it provided a ground upon which successive actions were built. The participation framework was not fixed, but was “open to challenge, negotiation, and modification” (2000, p. 1496). In the hopscotch game, a disagreement emerged over the legality of a particular move. One girl challenged the other girl’s action within the participation framework, revealing differing understandings of the ground for action, destabilizing the potential for coordinated progressive action. Through directing attention to the objects that compose the participation framework, a mutual agreement on the grounds for action was once again established, and actions could once again move forward. While this game of hopscotch provides a good example of negotiation, we could suppose that participation frameworks will be more or less open to negotiation depending on the degree to which they have been formalized.

Keller and Keller (1996) took a similar approach, using an activity theory framework to show how individuals work with tools and materials to coordinate routines of action. Analyzing the work of a blacksmith in his workshop, they noted that the blacksmith assembled a stable configuration of objects around him in order to conduct his work. These objects then informed his work at each step of the process, guiding his choices and both constraining and enabling his options. Keller and Keller referred to the configuration as a “constellation,” defined in the following way: “Our notion of constellation...refers to a conjunction of enabling ideas and physical components for accomplishment of a step in productive activity” (1996, p. 91). The assembled material objects and ideas formed the ground for action, and the consistency of the constellation

provided for a consistency of outcomes and routines. However, the constellation was not a fixed structure that determined outcomes. The constellation was negotiated at each step, with the blacksmith making choices at each step. Stable configurations result in routines, but the addition of new phenomena, either material objects or ideas, can change the outcome at each step of the way. Keller and Keller explained that “Routinely applied constellations may become steps in recipes for production of particular artifacts.... Nonetheless, revision of routinized constellations may occur as novel circumstances are encountered” (1996, p. 91). These bottom-up studies of routines in interaction did not view norms as internalized patterns, but as potentials that emerged from contextualized interaction. In this study, I will also view routines from the bottom-up, examining how the student-participants encounter and interact with different sources that guide the production of conventions in different ways.

Rather than considering context as a backdrop from which uniform discourse conventions emerge, it is useful to consider it as an *interactive* and contingent process. In this way, we can think of context as not something that uniformly determines written discourse conventions, but as a continuous process of interaction among materials and individuals in the environment, including written documents, classroom instruction, and spoken advice. As a result, ways of knowing and writing discourse conventions are contingent upon the interaction of these individuals and materials. In this way, context is not so much abstract forces or ideologies imposing ways of knowing and doing from above, but rather particular understandings that can be traced through lines of association among sources (Latour, 1996, 2005, 2010; Latour & Woolgar, 1986). Thus, context is a historical process that consists of the concepts and propositions that are coded in material

sources or conveyed by individuals through a series of interactions, through what Goodwin (2000) refers to as *contextual configurations*.² In this sense, learning is not a linear transfer of fixed ways of knowing and doing, but instead the result of interactions with particular sources, either other individuals or objects, which encode particular ways of knowing and doing. To put it more simply, context is not a pre-existing scene in which the writer or writing must fit, but a dynamic and emergent construction process.

In addition to interaction, in the following study I will look at how the student-participants negotiated variations in the written discourse conventions they encountered. By *negotiation*, I am referring to the process in which the student-participants dealt with differences in sources, including writing textbooks, instructors, peers, and various course readings, choosing one source's orientation over another's. In this study, I look at how the student-participants learned a set of conventions associated with introductions. Rather than presenting a unified view of introductions, the sources varied in their descriptions and examples of the features of introductions and the organization of those features. As a result, the student-participants needed to negotiate these different versions of introductions, aligning with some sources over others in cases of discontinuity. Moreover, the student-participants encountered different versions of introductions over the span of their academic experience, covering not only immediate encounters but also memories of past encounters, and this experience also comes into play in their negotiations,

² Goodwin defines contextual configuration as "A particular, locally relevant array of semiotic fields that participants demonstrably orient to" (2000, p. 1490). While Goodwin refers here to what participants consciously attend to, I will also take into consideration what the participants encounter unconsciously (Rickert, 2013), in this case the written discourse conventions also found in assigned readings which are not used to teach writing.

demonstrating the process-oriented nature not only of context but also of each participant within it.

Thus, in the following study, I take a close look at the learning of written discourse conventions as they occur through interaction and negotiation. Interaction involves learning that occurs ecologically, with the learner engaging with the environment rather than acting as a receptacle that passively receives the information given to it. Through interaction the learner is exposed to different ways of understanding, from which the learner weighs options and makes choices. Negotiation involves navigating through differing and sometimes conflicting ways of understanding written discourse conventions, and aligning with some sources over others in cases of discontinuity. I attempt to show what interaction and negotiation look like, in the inevitably partial view expressed in my data, through the encounters the participants had as they learned how to write academic introductions. In this study, I take a closer look at the variations in the sources the student-participants encountered, and how they chose to deal with these variations. In this way, I examine how the process of learning written discourse conventions is contingent and variable, based on particular encounters and a trajectory of experience, rather than a uniform enculturation within an academic context. From this perspective, I look at how we can begin to think of how individuals--not only experts, but also novices--play a role in producing what we think of as context, rather than context being imposed from the top-down.

4. Overview of Chapters

In Chapter 2, I review critiques of top-down, unified approaches to context as well as ecological approaches to composition and second language acquisition. I also present some conceptual foundations for considering written discourse conventions as phenomena that can be interpreted differently in different interactions, and how some interpretations become more favored over others. In Chapter 3, I explain the process of my research, including how I located my research site and how my research orientation changed as I collected data. I also introduce the student-participants and describe the university research site. In Chapter 4, I present data based on texts and samples of the student-participants' writing from the university, and in Chapter 5, I present data based on interviews with the student-participants describing their impressions of learning written discourse conventions at the university. Finally, in Chapter 6 I discuss the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 with a focus on variation and contingency of context.

CHAPTER 2: FOUNDATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE LEARNING OF WRITTEN DISCOURSE CONVENTIONS

In this chapter, I will examine problems with top-down orientations to learning written discourse conventions, and then look to alternatives to this model in composition studies and applied linguistics. First, I will outline critiques against the notions of culture and discourse community as stable and unified sources of knowledge of writing practices. Next, I will examine how ecological approaches to composition present an alternative way of theorizing the relationship between writers and the environment. Then, I will examine alternative approaches to second language learning in applied linguistics to gain a more detailed understanding of how learners interact with the environment. Finally, I will turn to non-canonical literature from recent theories in ecological psychology, extended cognition, and actor-network theory to provide a theoretical foundation for thinking through written discourse conventions as phenomena that are understood differently in different contexts, and for understanding how certain interpretations are favored over others.

1. Critiques of Top-down Orientations to Written Discourse Conventions

Contextual influences on writing have been analyzed in different ways, but in each we find a de-emphasis on interaction in favor of contextual forces determining the

written product. A top-down, contextual approach to writing is one that presumes shared understanding and agreement on writing practices among a group of individuals or a community, connected by a shared location, purpose, or interest. Such an approach can include culture (e.g., Kaplan, 1966), “academic writing” (e.g., Elbow, 1991), and discourse communities (e.g., Swales, 1990). Although the community metaphor--whether cultural, disciplinary, or professional--is a convenient conceptual tool for discussing or researching writing, various criticisms of the notion have been raised over the years.

I will now briefly review the critiques that have been made against two top-down orientations to context--culture and discourse communities--and how uniform agreement on written discourse conventions within these frames has been problematized. These critiques reveal initial problems with the linear transfer model of learning from the top down.

1.1 Critiques of Cultural Rhetorics

The idea that cultures have their own written rhetorical styles is one that intuitively has resonance, but has been pointedly criticized. Early studies of cultural rhetorics in second language writing asserted that languages have their own unique ways of organizing information in written form. Robert Kaplan was the first to present a detailed study of cultural rhetorics based on empirical data, although he later qualified the stronger claims of his early research. In his early study (1966), he characterized English, Semitic, Oriental, Romance language-based, and Russian writing as having distinct ways of organizing paragraphs, with these organization styles transferring over into writing in English as a second language. Many studies of cultural rhetorics followed. To give an

example, studies based on Japanese written rhetoric distinguished particular characteristics that differed from other cultural rhetorics, including a specific-to-general pattern of argument development (Kobayashi, 1984), a writing style that placed the burden of clarification and understanding on the reader instead of the writer (Hinds, 1987), and a particular pattern of writing which allowed for digressions from the main topic (the *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu* pattern, e.g., Denet, 1988, Hinds, 1987). These studies emphasized a uniformity, within a limited set of patterns, in the rhetorical organization of writing in Japanese culture, and assumed that individuals all adopt the same writing style within that culture.

Several criticisms of this assumption of uniformity were raised. Studies emerged that challenged conformity to a certain rhetorical style simply on the basis of national identity (e.g. Hirose, 2003). Drawing on anthropological research, Atkinson (1999b) argued against a “received view” that presented culture as monolithic, pointing out that culture is reproduced by individuals who change culture, and are themselves changed by culture. Atkinson explained, “Cultural knowledge, partly cognitive and partly social, is therefore constantly reconstrued and reconstructed in the agentive activities of human beings, although not in a wholly unconstrained way” (p. 640). The top-down approach of early studies of cultural rhetorics was seen as too excessive in its assertion of the unity and determinative nature of cultural context.

Alternatives to the monolithic nature of early cultural rhetoric studies were raised that emphasized the multiplicity and overlap of cultures, and choices made by individuals within a national context. Atkinson (2003, 2004) as well as Connor (2008), drawing on Holliday’s (1999) notion of small cultures, pointed out that instead of viewing culture as

one unified national culture, we should view a writer through an overlapping of smaller cultures (e.g. home, school, work), each of which exert influence on the writer in different ways. Atkinson (2004) also described culture as an adaptive and evolving process, a notion I will return to in discussion of the sociocognitive orientation to language learning below. Similar to the notion of small cultures, criticism has also come from the perspective that culture is a mix of varied and sometimes competing influences, which change over time, also pointing towards the notion of culture as process rather than monolithic. Thus, Kubota (1997) critiqued Hinds' claims about Japanese writing in her finding that Japanese writing professors judged a deductive style to be better than an inductive style. She noted that western rhetorical styles have influenced Japan since the 19th century, so any claims to a monolithic Japanese rhetorical style ignores the historical nature of culture, and the influences from outside that also shape it. In You's (2005) discussion of the Chinese rhetorical tradition, he also noted the historical influence of a western style, but additionally emphasized that Chinese writing instruction has historically been a mix of competing schools, demonstrating that cultural rhetoric is indeterminate rather than unified.

1.2 Critiques of Discourse Communities

While the concept of culture has been used to describe the writing practices of individuals within national boundaries, the notion of community has been used to delimit the kinds of writing that occur in academic and workplace settings. One version of this is the concept of *discourse community* (e.g. Beaufort, 1997, 1999, 2007; Flowerdew, 2000; Johns, 1997; Swales, 1990). Yet discourse communities shared with monocultural

orientations similar problems of top-down determinism. Swales (1990) described a discourse community as a group of individuals with shared goals and shared genres of communication, though not necessarily a shared geographic location. Swales later acknowledged problems with the discourse community notion, but still believed in its utility as a conceptual tool. In his later work he offered a refined definition through the “place discourse community” (Swales, 1998), locating the community within more specific spatial boundaries.

However, this failed to answer many of the criticisms raised against the original concept. Interestingly, Porter (1986) anticipated many of these later criticisms in his early article in favor of discourse communities. Porter wrote his article in reaction to the individual freedom and creativity advocated by *expressivism*, instead emphasizing the importance of community norms and conventions. Nevertheless, he noted that discourse communities are fragmented and evolving, rather than static and monolithic. He pointed out that the rules of a community may be more or less institutionalized, a community may have competing factions or indefinite boundaries, and that writers themselves change the community: “every text admitted into a discourse community changes the constitution of the community” (p. 41). However, as the discourse community concept was taken up by researchers, these points of variation were deemphasized in favor of presenting community norms as continuous and uncontested. This prompted Harris (1989) to critique the idea of community, asserting that the idea implies that the community “directs and determines” writing (p. 12) and ignores the “tensions, discontinuities, and conflicts in the sorts of talk and writing that go on everyday in the classrooms and departments of an actual university” (p. 14).

Similarly, Prior (2003) offered his critique of the notion of community, pointing out that the discourse community concept, Porter's concessions notwithstanding, did not offer an adequate explanation of genre change. Prior instead stressed that a historical approach was needed, one that accounts for writing conventions changing over time. Hyland (2004) reiterated these critiques, pointing out that within a discourse community, "there are considerable variations in the extent to which members identify with their myriad goals, methods, and beliefs, participate in their diverse activities, and identify themselves with their conventions, histories, or values" (p. 9). While he acknowledged that discourse communities share norms and conventions, he advised caution in "emphasizing the degree to which a consensus exists, and how far the authority of a single overarching disciplinary paradigm determines behavior" (p. 10-11).

As with the critique of culture, discourse communities were also critiqued as too uniform, underemphasizing their indeterminate and process-oriented nature. The idea of linear transfer of uniformly agreed upon written discourse conventions to a learner within a discourse community was thus problematized. In the responses that followed, which I will collectively address as ecological approaches to writing, two points of contention were addressed: the unity and deterministic nature of context, and whether the writer is the locus of agency in writing.

2. Ecological Approaches to Writing as Alternatives to Top-down Approaches

Top-down approaches take a view that emphasizes context in the discussion of writing practices, but the context serves as more of a pre-existing set of variables or backdrop, one which restricts behavior and which participants must conform to, not

unlike the walls of a maze or the rules of a game of chess. Ecological approaches to writing also note the importance of influences outside of the individual writer, but the environment, in a sociohistoric sense that is not confined to a particular place or time, becomes a participant which is also changed by the actions of individual writers. In an early article, Cooper (1986) took a position against expressivism, which transferred a lot of freedom and turned creative control over to the individual writer. Cooper argued against a model of writing that views the writer as the locus of ideas and agency, and instead envisioned writing as a social act--as “an activity in which the writer is continually engaged with a variety of socially constituted systems” (p. 367). She also made a point of distancing herself from context, stating that “the term *ecological*, however, is not simply the newest way to say ‘contextual’” (p. 367). She explained that the writer and writing in an ecological approach “both determine and are determined by” (p. 368) the social systems of which they are a part, emphasizing a circular feedback loop between writer and the greater social environment. Similarly, Syverson (1999) also pointed out the importance of circular feedback. She explained that “composition does not consist in transferring what is inside the head onto paper or a computer screen. It is a manifestation of the coordination between internal and external structures, which are constituted by and expressed through cultural and cognitive dimensions of every human activity” (p. 183). Using a distributed cognition approach, she viewed ecological systems as composed of smaller complex systems that are “adaptive, self-organizing, and dynamic” (p. 183). Taking one solitary poet as a case study, she presented his writing not as the act of an individual genius, but one in which the writer worked in collaboration with editors, publishing equipment, relatives, historical and contemporary textual

influences, and even the streets of the city he lived in, by way of his inspirational walks through them.

Cooper and Syverson demonstrated an ecological orientation that emphasizes the environment not as something that imposes ways of knowing and doing unilaterally, but as something that is co-constituted by the individuals and material elements within it. Edbauer (2005) built on these previous ecological approaches, also considering writing as a dynamic process of interaction among actors with historical trajectories, while emphasizing a critique of the place/container metaphor for the rhetorical situation, not unlike Prior's (2003) critique of discourse communities. Edbauer stated that she wanted to "add the dimensions of history and movement (back) into our visions/versions of rhetoric's public situations, reclaiming rhetoric from artificially *elementary* frameworks" (p. 9). Replacing the container metaphor with a viral one, she argued that messages cross boundaries and affect different areas, with the result that areas *bleed* into each other. She gave an example of a message created by small-shop merchants in Austin, Texas to "Keep Austin Weird" in response to the entry of big chain stores into the city. This message in turn was appropriated by the local government in promotional material for the city, and finally became part of the marketing campaign of a nationwide cell phone service provider. Edbauer illustrated here that the rhetorical situation is not a fixed location, but draws from ideas--and, we might add, conventions--that intersect many rhetorical events. While Edbauer's focus here was on replacing rhetorical situations with *rhetorical ecologies*, her critique of the place/container metaphor adds to an understanding of context as contingent rather than fixed and determinative. Given the contingency of context, what determines written discourse conventions is not top-down

but instead based on the historical and moment-to-moment trajectories of elements that compose any given learning situation.

Cooper (2011) built on her own previous work and gives us a richer understanding of the individual within an ecological framework. While an ecological approach emphasizes the interaction between the individual and other elements in the environment, the individual's agency within the ecology remains undertheorized. Cooper took an approach in which the agency of an individual, rather than being determined by the environment or discourse, is based on the history of his or her embodied encounters with the environment over time. Cooper used the term "agents" in place of the subject, and explained, "Unlike subjects, agents are defined neither by mastery, nor by determination, nor by fragmentation. They are unique, embodied, and autonomous individuals in that they are self-organizing, but by virtue of that fact, they, as well as the surround with which they interact, are always changing" (p. 425). Interactions with the environment over time shape the individual's *disposition*, which influences his or her intentions and actions unconsciously. Cooper gave us a complex understanding of writer agency as formed historically through interactions. Thus, a writer's interactions with elements of the environment are unconsciously influenced by a trajectory of past encounters.

Unconscious influence of elements in an ecology upon the writer is also the basis for the work of Rickert (2004, 2013), which emphasized the role of objects in the environment on composing. Rickert approached rhetoric as a *revealing* of the world in different ways. Rickert (2013) offered the following definition of rhetoric:

Rhetoric is a responsive way of revealing the world for others, responding to and put forth through affective, symbolic, and material means, so as to (at least potentially) reattune or otherwise transform how others inhabit the world to an extent that calls for some action. (p. 162)

A key point in Rickert's approach to rhetoric was that rhetoric occurs not only between individuals, but also between objects and individuals, as well as object to object, as they disclose the world in concert to and with the individual. Rickert put an emphasis on objects as existing and interacting as things in themselves, and in turn interacting with individuals in such a way that individuals understand the world based on the particular configuration of objects encountered in the environment. Arguing against a social constructivist epistemology which places a divide between the individual and the environment, Rickert asserted that things in the environment interact rhetorically among themselves and with individuals by revealing things in a particular way, such that our impressions--conscious and unconscious--of the world are not based only on our own constructed thoughts but also through the perceptions, motivations and affective states generated by objects in the environment. He gave an example of the coffee shop, which, through its composition and arrangement of objects (walls, tables, music, lighting) conditions our being in the world, drawing attention to certain things, creating a particular mood, evoking routines, and which in revealing the world in a particular way invites us to act in response. The world acts upon us, prompting an appropriate response.

While the environment coordinates and invites response (Lingis, 1998), it is also shaped by our own revealing, through our acting upon the world. Rickert's notion of ambient rhetoric does not suggest that context, or the rhetorical situation, univocally determines the response (e.g., Bitzer, 1968). Instead, the revealing of the world occurs

both ways, with the individual's response to the world's disclosure in turn affecting the world in a way that the world's future responses are changed. The world and the individual are not divided, but enmeshed in their revealings and responses. This view does not give undue weight to the individual in revealing the world in a particular way, nor does it overemphasize the environment. Rickert explained, "Human subjects do not of themselves disclose or bodily bear and express such disclosure. Being in the world discloses. That is to say, there is a mutually conditioning amalgam of humans, animals, environment, and things that co-responsively produce disclosure, including, necessarily, the forms of disclosure that render these entities as what they are for one another" (Rickert, 2013, p. 183). Applying this to learning writing practices suggests that what we learn from context, including culture and community, is not imposed monolithically or uncontested. Although the environment contains individuals and symbolic discourse, it also contains objects (e.g. tools, clocks, desks, cultural artifacts, religious objects), which shape individuals' interactions with the world. Furthermore, objects in the world interact with each other, not always within conscious awareness, and in this way shape how we know the world and how we act in the world.

Ecological approaches present alternatives to bounded contexts, emphasizing circular feedback and shared agency. Learners deal with an environment in flux, in which their own interactions influence and change that environment. When we consider interaction in the learning of written discourse conventions, through an ecological approach we see that ways of knowing these conventions are not imposed by a uniform context, but are instead the result of encounters with elements of the environment.

Furthermore, these encounters take place on the basis of the history of each element of the interaction, including the history of the learner.

Ecological approaches share with critiques of culture and community the notion that "context" is indeterminate and in flux, but also emphasize the reflexive nature of interaction across individuals. Two problems with a linear transfer model were uncovered in the critiques of top-down approaches to learning written discourse conventions and the ecological alternatives. First, a linear transfer model presupposes that community knowledge is transmitted directly from context to the learner. However, in critiques of top-down approaches, uniform agreement on written discourse conventions within a culture or community was problematized. Second, as we saw with ecological orientations, the linear transfer model does not account for reflexivity (feedback loops) between the learner and environment in the process of adopting a practice. "Community" and "culture" are contingent, a process that involves an evolving trajectory of interaction among its components.

3. Interaction through Joint Attention, Alignment, and Trajectories of Experience in Learning Written Discourse Conventions

I will next introduce research in applied linguistics for a closer examination of learning as a process of interaction with an environment in flux. While we find variability and indeterminacy in the environment, we also find agreement, routines, and rituals. In the following paragraphs I will examine 1) how the world is revealed in interaction through joint attention, 2) how particular ways of knowing and doing are aligned to,

creating routines of learning and practice, and 3) how routines and rituals evolve through a trajectory of experience.

3.1. Joint Attention in Learning Written Discourse Conventions

A way of theorizing learning that involves objects in the environment as well as the learner is provided through van Lier's (2002, 2004, 2011) notion of *triadic interaction*. Learning is conventionally conceived of as transmission through dyadic interaction, such as a teacher or mentor conveying information to a learner, or the learner reading a textbook. A dyadic framework implies a one-way transmission of information from the source to the receiver. In a triadic interaction, however, joint attention plays a key role, in that the mentor does not send information but instead directs attention to a third object, encouraging the student-- the "receiver"--to understand and interact with it in the same way (see also Goodwin, 1994, 2003). To take language as an example, the mentor directs attention to a particular situated way of knowing the language, rather than transmitting pure knowledge of a universal set of rules. Learning in this sense is not transmission but a process of a mentor and student attending to a third object in the same way.

Additionally, a dyadic view removes the local environment from the act of learning. However, as we saw in Rickert's discussion of ambience, all learning is triadic, in that the local environment always plays some role in the directing of attention. Isolated dyadic interactions do not capture the embedded nature of the learner in the world. Taking an example reminiscent of Ingold (2000), a mentor (or a textbook) could direct a learner's attention towards a piece of wood in a way that evokes it as a potential spear.

The interpretation of the stick as a spear is not based solely on the mentor's idiosyncratic interpretation of the object, but on the interpretation along with the features that the object presents to the world, such as its hardness and aerodynamic form. Knowing the wood as a potential spear is also based on interaction with the world, which involves an environment that requires hunting tools. Learning to understand a particular kind of wood as a potential weapon is not based on a somehow unfiltered transmission of an understanding of the wood as a weapon from mentor to apprentice. Instead, it is built on the mentor's way of knowing, including world knowledge as to the importance of hunting in that society, in combination with the properties of the wood and the wood's place in the environment. We can see in this example how knowledge is based on interaction through attention to the object which also involves the environment working to disclose the world (Rickert, 2013) in particular ways.³

A triadic interaction is not necessarily limited to three interactants.⁴ For example, a teacher directs attention to a textbook in which a grammar point is presented as having a particular form, and is used in particular situations. Here we have four interactants--the teacher, the learner, the textbook, and the grammar that is attended to. The attention is not only based on what is written in the textbook, but on how the teacher highlights (Goodwin, 1994) different ways of knowing the grammar point in the textbook. Even between an individual and a textbook, the two are embedded in the world, and the textbook directs attention to a third object, such as grammar, revealing it in a particular way.

³ Goodwin (2000, 2003, 2007) and Keller & Keller (1996) offer similar views of learning through interacting with objects in the world, as discussed in Chapter 1.

⁴ Although I will continue to use the phrase *triadic interaction*, I include the possibility of more than three interactants.

As the above examples illustrate, symbols which emerge in the course of interaction with the environment are also interpreted through triadic interaction. Van Lier first explained, “the context provides *affordances* (possibilities for action that yield opportunities for engagement and participation) that can stimulate intersubjectivity, joint attention, and various kinds of linguistic commentary.... A rich semiotic budget of resources, I hypothesize, stimulates the emergence of language” (2004, p. 81). For van Lier, language was not something that we impose on the world, and was not a static structure, but was contingent upon interaction. It emerges from interaction in the world, and is constantly negotiated in interaction. Van Lier further explained,

A crucial characteristic of language is the mapping of structure onto function, or the relationship between form and meaning. This relationship is constantly being interpreted and reinterpreted in every act of speaking, as part of the negotiation of meaning that accompanies every dialogical interchange...new meanings are routinely created for old forms, both accidentally and on purpose. (2004, p. 88)

Language varies based on the meaning and use that emerges through triadic interaction. Written discourse conventions such as introductions are also learned in this way. An instructor or textbook could direct a learner's attention to the introduction to understand it in a particular way. However, this understanding is also mediated by other sources in the environment, which may highlight different features or contradict the way of knowing presented by the instructor or textbook.

Churchill (2007) gave a detailed example of triadic interaction in his case study of learning a new word, demonstrating how the environment reveals the word through interactions. In his study, Churchill explained how he gradually developed a contextualized understanding of the Japanese word *saiketsu*, which is a medical term that

refers to drawing blood. He developed an initial understanding of the word when first encountering it in the hospital, but originally interpreted it, based on his understanding of the correspondence between Japanese spoken syllables and orthography, as *re-taking* blood *pressure*. As he encountered the word in different contexts, he continued to refine his understanding of the word, and the meaning of the word was revealed in specific ways in particular contexts. He explained how on a later occasion,

Given the artifacts that my nurse was handling combined with the very physical input that I had just received, I was able to refine my hypothesis regarding the meaning of *saiketsu*.... The next morning, my hypothesis was further confirmed when a nurse carrying a paper cup, a syringe, and vials came to my bed area and said *saiketsu sasete itadakimasu*. (2007, p. 348)

The triadic interaction illustrated here extended beyond three interactants, but the spirit is the same. The interaction of the individual with the objects in the room, the gestures of the nurse, and the words that follow *saiketsu*, indicating it as an action that is to be taken, all worked to shape an understanding of the meaning of the word. If this word were encountered in a different context, for example as an isolated utterance on a radio broadcast, its meaning would be much more difficult to ascertain. The objects around the word contribute to the meaning of the word as much as the word itself. Thus, learning a language--or a written discourse convention--is not based purely on a dyadic interaction between two individuals, or an individual and a textbook. The environment is always contributing to the interaction, shaping the language that is learned. Two individuals, or an individual and another object, are never isolated, and are always calling attention to another individual or object in some way, disclosing that object in concert with other objects and sources in the environment. Returning to written discourse

conventions, we can see how this learning also occurs through a triadic process as well. The first step in education is rhetorical, in that it is an act of disclosing the world to another in a particular way. Written discourse conventions are learned through joint attention, in which a learner's attention is directed to the convention by a third interactant, typically either a textbook or instructor, disclosing it to the learner and also revealing it in a particular way.

3.2. Alignment in Learning Written Discourse Conventions

Having established joint attention through triadic interaction as the first step in learning written discourse conventions, we can now turn to the question of how one way of knowing a convention is favored over another. Since context is variable, the individual encounters many different ways of knowing and doing, based on the different ways the world is disclosed to the individual through triadic action. This occurs in both educational and non-educational settings. Given that there are many *possible* ways of knowing and interacting with the world, how are some ways reproduced over others? On a very local level, in a triadic interaction, this occurs through aligning with another's way of engaging with the world. Atkinson (2002), in arguing that symbolic structure, in this case language, emerges through interaction in the world, described language as a *sociocognitive* phenomena, in that it emerges from social and material interaction in the world, which then changes cognition, with cognition in turn affecting the world, so that thought begins to follow a pattern that emerges from interaction between mind, body, and world, but is

still dependent upon the world.⁵ Even if language is contingent and emergent (Hopper, 1998, 2007), it still has some structure or pattern. But in order for the pattern to emerge, an adaptation to the world and to others' interactions in the world is required. This adaptation involves a coordination of one's ways of knowing and doing to those of others and the environment (Goodwin, 2007). Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, and Okada (2007) explained that,

For the individual, if the mind-body-world environment is permanently in flux, then in order to survive and flourish he or she must engage in a permanent process of dynamic adaptivity to it. As a first approximation, let us equate this ongoing process of adaptive dynamics fundamentally with *learning*; that is, the adaptiveness characterizing the ongoing alignment of the human organism to its changing environment is simply learning by another name. (p. 171)

Though the environment is in flux, with different objects and individuals revealing the world in different ways, communication and coordinated interaction occur through adaptation, or alignment, to the ways of knowing and doing of others. As individuals coordinate and adapt their actions to each other and the environment, a structure emerges, including the symbolic structure of language. This structure is not a monolithic influence on others, however, as it is still contingent upon interactions between mind, body, and world. Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, and Okada viewed the structure of language as an effect of interaction and adaptation, rather than as an objective structure that exists only in the mind or only in the world. In the same way, we can view written discourse conventions not as an objective set of routines imposed by a monolithic

⁵ To take mathematical reasoning as an example, humans first develop the ability to manipulate and arrange material objects, which allows for higher levels of calculation. The development of tools such as the abacus allows for even higher levels of mathematical reasoning, with the tool shaping cognition and allowing for more abstract mental calculation. Writing instruments are also tools that then feed back into cognition, allowing for building higher levels of complex thought.

context, but as phenomena that are constructed and reconstructed through interaction. In their study of a Japanese student learning a grammar point from a tutor, Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, and Okada (2007)⁶ presented the learning not as the product of a simple dyad between tutor and student, but as also including “a rich array of sociocognitive tools and affordances: grammar exercises, pens, books, tables, chairs, conventional definitions of the situation (e.g., the tutoring speech event), participant roles, gestures, bodily orientations, even video equipment--the list goes on and on” (p. 184-185). We see here then that an assortment of objects and actions in the environment work in concert to direct attention towards the language in a certain way, and that the process of learning includes aligning to the ways the object, in this case grammar, is attended to in interaction with the environment. Through alignment, an individual adapts to another’s ways of knowing and doing, and continual processes of alignment result in perpetuation of particular ways of knowing and acting in the world.

3.3. Trajectories of Experience in Learning Written Discourse Conventions

Variability of context can account for differences in ways of knowing and doing, as different aspects of the world are revealed in different triadic interactions. However, this is an incomplete account of variation and change. Interactions do not occur anew each time, but instead build upon previous interactions. As we saw in Cooper’s discussion of rhetorical agency, previous interactions shape dispositions, which affect

⁶ See also Atkinson, 2011; Churchill et al., 2010

future interactions.⁷ Interactions are diachronic rather than synchronic, and learning is a process that is based on earlier encounters. Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, and Okada (2007) also defined learning as “trajectories of ecological experience and repertoires of participation, gained in the process of adaptive dynamics” (p. 172).⁸ Through the process of alignment and adaptation, each new interaction is not encountered fresh, but instead with the baggage of previous encounters. This results in changes in how the world is disclosed or known, based not only on the immediate triadic interaction, but also based on the previous encounters of all the members of the immediate interaction. This can result in a refinement of a way of knowing, or, alternatively, a revisioning of the object or practice. We see the trajectory of experience illustrated in the previous example from Churchill (2007), in which he developed hypotheses about the meaning of the word *saiketsu*, which he then revised over time. The initial encounter with the word was not the final determination of its meaning. Rather, the initial encounter revealed the word in a particular way, but successive triadic interactions, in which the same word was encountered with different individuals and different objects in the environment, altered his initial understanding of the word. Here we find that the ways the world is known vary not only on the basis of a context in flux, but also based on the stored experiences of the individual over time.

Looking at written discourse conventions as phenomena that take meaning through interaction gives us a view of norms as part of a circulatory feedback loop, in which an understanding of a convention is impressed upon the learner through triadic

⁷ Chin (1994), in her study of journalism students, pointed out that context includes not only the immediate elements in the act of writing, but also past encounters and future goals, all of which affect the choice individuals make in a given moment.

⁸ See also Wenger (1998)

interaction and joint attention, but the learner also pushes back, interpreting meaning and use based on his or her own trajectory of experience. In the following sections, I will extend these notions to consider how implicit writing conventions become discrete objects that can then be interpreted locally through triadic interaction and joint attention. Furthermore, I will extend the notion of alignment, using actor-network theory (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011; Latour, 2005) to consider how alignment results in contingent structures and coordinated agreement.

4. Written Discourse Conventions as Independent Objects

In this study, I will look at how one particular writing practice, the academic introduction,⁹ is encountered by the student-participants in different forms and ways, and how they negotiate these differences. In the previous section, we looked at examples of words and language that were known differently in different interactions. In Section 4.1, I will present a theoretical basis for considering how written discourse conventions, as concepts, can show up differently in different triadic interactions. In Section 4.2, I will consider how implicit writing conventions become concepts. In Section 5, I will extend the notion of alignment, considering how the weight of authority of sources influences alignment with some sources over others, and produces coordinated interaction.

⁹ I will consider written discourse conventions as units that are also assemblages (Bennett, 2004, 2005, 2010; Delanda, 2006) of individual units. For example, an introduction can be discussed as a single unit, but its parts, such as a thesis statement, can also be discussed as separate units. These units may also become parts of other assemblages. Assemblage theory helps to consider the larger object and its parts as independent units, each of which can be revealed and understood separately, but have different effects when combined as a whole. This distinguishes an assemblage from a random collection. The introduction assemblage has functions such as introducing a body of work or generating interest, which differ from the function of the thesis statement which is a part of it.

4.1 Concepts into Objects

Earlier I discussed van Lier's (2002, 2004, 2011) and Churchill's (2007) views of language as something that is revealed differently in different interactions. I will next examine more closely how conventions as concepts can be known differently in different triadic interactions. We have seen with joint attention and sociocognitive alignment that individuals work with objects in the environment to jointly attend to things, and reveal them in a particular way. In the study by Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, and Okada (2007), English grammar, specifically the present perfect tense, was taught and learned in coordination with talk, gesture, gaze, and teaching materials. The grammar was encountered not as a unified, unchanging structure, but as something that emerged through codified rules in documents in tandem with joint attention and intensive interaction. I will approach written discourse conventions in a similar way. In order to think through conventions as objects that vary across contexts, I first turn to Andy Clark, whose work on extended cognition helps us to consider how symbols and ideas put into the world become platforms for thinking. Clark argued that,

As soon as we formulate a thought in words (or on paper), it becomes an object for ourselves and for others. As an object, it is the kind of thing we can have thoughts about. In creating the object, we need have no thoughts about thoughts - but once it is there, the opportunity immediately exists to attend to it as an object in its own right. (1997, p. 209)

Once we externalize a concept in words or images, it becomes a thing in itself, "an object in its own right," something that we and others can interact with. Through triadic interaction and joint attention, objects in the environment disclose it (Rickert, 2013) in a particular way, drawing attention to particular aspects of the concept or particular ways of knowing the concept. As Clark explained, "Importantly, the presence of the material

symbol impacts behavior not in virtue of being the key to a rich inner mental representation (though it may be this also) but rather by itself, qua material symbol, providing a new target for selective attention and a new fulcrum for control of action” (2011, p. 45). Once the concept is put out into the world as a material symbol, it becomes something we can act upon and attend to independently.¹⁰

As we learn or use a concept, we do not have a God's-eye view of it. We have partial knowledge of the concept, which is dependent upon how we interact with it through triadic interaction. Gabora, Rosch, and Aerts (2008) built on Gibson's (1986) theory of direct perception to present an ecological theory of concepts, explaining how concepts are understood differently in different contexts.¹¹ Similar to Clark, they argued that “Concepts and categories do not represent the world in the mind, as is generally assumed, but are a participating part of the mind-world whole” (Gabora, Rosch, & Aerts, 2008, p. 95). Drawing on Gibson's notion of affordances (see previous footnote), they

¹⁰ Actor-network theory and object-oriented philosophy also take ideas and concepts as things-in-themselves which we act upon, and which act upon us. Bruno Latour wrote, “*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor.... Thus, the questions to ask about any agent are simply the following: Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent's action or not?” (2005, p. 71). Latour included non-material things in this definition of actors: “Besides material objects incorporated into the society, there must also be included the products of previous social activity: law, established customs, literary and artistic works, etc.” (2005, p. 73). Levi Bryant (who uses his own term *onticology* to refer to object-oriented ontology) explained that “In addition to natural beings, onticology also counts technologies, symbolic entities, fictional entities, groups, nations, works of art, possible beings, artificial entities, and many other entities besides as belonging to the domain of real being” (2011, p. 41). Ian Bogost also explained that “The objects of object-oriented thought mean to encompass anything whatsoever, from physical matter (a Slurpee frozen beverage) to properties (frozenness) to marketplaces (the convenience store industry) to symbols (the Slurpee brand name) to ideas (a best guess about where to find a 7-11)” (2012, p. 24).

¹¹ Key to Gibson's theory of direct perception (1986) is the notion of affordances, which suggests that things in the world present particular properties to the individual, allowing the individual some degree of access to the thing in itself, which is not hidden behind a screen of culture or discourse (Costall et al., 1989; Costall, 2012; Dotov et al., 2012; Kadar & Effken, 1994). However, affordances are relations (Chemero, 2009), and the ability to interact is dependent upon the capacities of the individual in relation to the properties of the object (Chemero, 2003, 2009; Warren, 1984), which evolve in interaction over developmental time (Withagen & Van der Kamp, 2010). Leo van Lier also drew on Gibson's idea of affordances in his notion of triadic interaction (2000, 2002, 2004).

explained that concepts have different meanings for different individuals, but the meaning is also dependent upon the local environment. We can consider this as the outcome of a triadic interaction between individuals, the concept, and objects in the environment. In their discussion of prototypes, or concepts that are considered more typical in a group of related concepts, Gabora, Rosch, and Aerts noted that “A very important finding about prototypes and graded structure is how sensitive they are to context” (p. 89). They gave specific examples: “a DRINK might mean BEER in the context of truck drivers, MILK in the context of a school lunch, and WINE in the context of a dinner party” (p. 96). These examples illustrated how particular concepts take on different inflections of meaning depending on the objects around them. Returning to the example of *saiketsu* in Churchill (2007), the concept that was brought forth verbally in the hospital room had a particular meaning realized in relation to syringes, nurses, examinations, medical measuring equipment, and human bodies.

For the purposes of this study, I will be considering concepts that have been manifested in some “material” form, which can be exchanged and interacted with by different people and objects in the environment. As an example, individuals create symbols through sound, gesture, or writing/marking. On the one hand these symbols are representations for something: A word can represent something, and a photograph can represent something. A recording can represent a sound that originally manifested in a particular physical setting at some particular time. But once these are put into the world as representations, they can be interacted with as things in themselves, and can be understood differently in different triadic interactions, much as a text can be interpreted in different ways.

4.2 Practice into Concepts

While individuals encounter written discourse conventions through conscious joint attention, discourse conventions are also encountered and reproduced unconsciously. When we write, we do not do so haphazardly, but instead follow conventions that we have learned not only explicitly through instruction, but also implicitly through exposure to written materials. Bakhtin noted that we regularly follow routines in speech and writing without conscious awareness:

Our repertoire of oral (and written) speech genres is rich. We use them confidently and skillfully *in practice*, and it is quite possible for us not even to suspect their existence *in theory*.... We speak in diverse genres without suspecting that they exist. Even in the most free, the most unconstrained conversation, we cast our speech in definite generic forms. (1986, p. 78)

We write through a combination of conscious and unconscious awareness of the conventions we use. A style of a respected author can be modeled, but the learner may not be able to articulate all of the conventions that accompany the style. However, the learner can reflect on the author's style, moving it from unconscious engagement to conscious conceptual territory.

Although we have many routines and conventions as a part of our being in the world, it is a conscious act to bring them into the world in a particular way. These ways of differentiating, subdividing, and classifying are a part of the act of conceptualizing routines, which bring conventions into the world as concepts. For example, the way that a hip rotates when walking is a routine that we are not normally aware of, as it is not something we normally attend to. However, the rotation of the hip might be attended to by a robotics engineer who is interested in designing a robot with a natural walk. This

rotation can then be named, diagrammed, measured, and inscribed in documents. Through this focused attention and documentation it becomes a concept that can be interacted with. Furthermore, the environment plays a role in our attending to a convention as a thing in itself. Attention is drawn to the routine due to the particular environment in which the robotics engineer interacts. Once the environment warrants attending to a routine, then it can become a concept that can be understood and measured in different ways. Bourdieu noted that practice is something that cannot be fully described: "As soon as he reflects on his practice, adopting a quasi-theoretical posture, the agent loses any chance of expressing the truth of the practice" (1980/1990, p. 91). Routines, as instances of practice, are known in particular ways through how they are attended to. In the hip rotation example given above with robotics engineers, the routine would be known in a particular way through triadic interaction with the video technology that allows it to be closely and repeatedly observed by the engineers; the measuring instruments that map the dimensions of movement; and the technical knowledge that exists in documents and software that the engineer interacts with. Individuals who are not robotics engineers could also attend to the hip rotation, but would have a different understanding of it, without these other instruments and texts that the robotics engineer has access to.

Like the routine of bodily movement in this example, written discourse conventions are routines that are attended to through triadic interaction, and then known in particular ways based on the composition of agents in that interaction. A convention such as a rhetorical "hook" or the use of "I" may be reproduced unconsciously, without particular awareness of the practice as a discrete phenomenon. However, writing

textbooks can call attention to it, revealing the practice, and then prescribe a particular form and use, shaping how the convention is known once it has been brought to conscious attention.

5. Weight of Authority in Alignment to Written Discourse Conventions

Although written discourse conventions are revealed and learned through triadic interaction and joint attention, not all ways of understanding them have equal weight, or authority. The authority of a particular way of knowing a written discourse convention is based on the number and weight of the sources that are associated with that definition (Latour 1988, 1999, 2005).¹² For example, if there is no reference material on how to write a business memo for a company, and no samples are available, then we could suppose there would be flexibility regarding how the memo is written, and newcomers in search of guidance may draw (sometimes incorrectly) from previous experience in other organizations (as in the case study of a newcomer to a nonprofit organization described in Beaufort (1999)). If, on the other hand, a colleague who has worked at the organization for a year gives advice on how to write the memo, the amount of flexibility becomes restricted a little. If a reference sheet is then found that contains examples of previous memos, but contradicts the colleague's advice, the reference material will typically take precedence. The reference material has more weight and authority for several reasons, including its status as an official document, but what I would like to focus on here is its

¹² See also Goodwin's (1994) discussion of expert testimony.

ties to previous examples. Through these associations, the reference material becomes an authority on how things are done, in contrast to the lone voice of the colleague.¹³

Latour and Woolgar (1986) addressed this issue in their discussion of the establishment of "facts" --which can refer to the existence of a thing or a particular way of knowing it--and explained how facts are established through a chain of inscriptions. For example, a machine takes a measurement (an inscription), and if that measurement is replicated, then it moves towards becoming a fact. It can still be disproven though, so it is not until it is published and cited many times that it becomes more solid--more real. These additional inscriptions give weight and authority to the measurement. Once a phenomenon is revealed or understood in a particular way, the more sources that support a particular way of knowing that phenomenon, the more that vision of the phenomenon is considered factual. In their description of the weight and authority of a particular science article, Latour and Woolgar explained how the article became the basis of fact for additional research: "This one paper...thus provided the focus of a variety of operations performed by later articles. Its weight depended both on its use of earlier literature, inscription devices, documents, and statements as well as on subsequent reaction to it" (p. 86).

In his study of Pasteur, Latour (1988) described how the remedy for sicknesses that plagued France in the late 19th century was prescribed as good hygiene, or good washing methods. Pasteur presented the innovative notion that it was in fact a new substance, microbes, that was an external cause of the sickness, which was not connected

¹³ Latour writing as Johnson (1988)(see also Latour, 1999) gave a fuller account of the process by which use and value are *delegated* to an object such that previous controversies or alternative uses are erased retroactively. Similar accounts are found in Goodwin's (1994) account of an archaeologist's Munsell chart, and Wenger's (1998) account of reification. See also Fenwick & Edwards (2010).

to personal cleanliness, but based on contagion. As such, it required different prevention strategies. The significant difference in terms of public health measures was a focus on draining the breeding grounds of microbes, and vaccination against these microbes.

Latour described the existence of the microbes as the result of the work of Pasteur to reveal them, which in turn was based on chains of inscriptions in documentation and measuring instruments within the medical discipline. Latour asked, "Did the microbe exist before Pasteur? From the practical point of view - I say practical, not theoretical - it did not. To be sure, Pasteur did not invent the microbe out of thin air. But he shaped it by displacing the edges of several other previous agents and moving them to the laboratory in such a way that they became unrecognizable" (1988, p. 80). Pasteur was able to build on previous understandings of the world, and, through an alliance of documentation and instruments, direct attention to a new way of handling the illnesses. Pasteur's insight was not enough, and he still required others to align with his view. Latour explains, "It is pointless to claim that Pasteur's discoveries were believed because they were convincing. They ended up being convincing because hygienists believed them and forced everybody else to *put them into practice*" (p. 54). Latour attempted to explain here how the weight of authority determines particular understandings of things, and he went so far as to say that the weight of authority, through chains of alliances, determines reality. Latour explained that "An entity gains in reality if it is associated with many others that are viewed as collaborating with it. It loses in reality if, on the contrary, it has to shed associates or collaborators (human and nonhuman)" (1999, p. 158). If we view this in terms of associations determining the weight or authority of an interpretation, we can understand how not only prestige and status but also the number of sources that support a

particular interpretation determine how one way of knowing, or variation, is perpetuated over another.

Latour and Woolgar (1979) explained the process in which “facts” are established in local interactions. In this process, new facts are grounded in established knowledge, or in other words are linked to facts that already have strong chains of alliances. Facts are established in the following ways:

1. **References are made to inscribed documentation of related ways of knowing**

and seeing. We could also say that references are made to tools and forms of technology that measure and establish these ways of knowing an object.

Regarding written discourse conventions as an example, textbooks, sample essays, and course readings could all be used as inscribed documentation--sources of authority--establishing a discourse convention in a particular way.

2. **Through conversation, interlocutors are guided towards acceptable ways of**

knowing and seeing. This could be viewed as a form of disciplining, in which digressions from commonly accepted ways of knowing and seeing are subtly discouraged. This could occur through nonverbal guidance such as intonation and body language that indicate approval or disapproval of the line of thinking of the interlocutor, or through questions such as asking for the source or basis of the nonstandard interpretations. We can see this taking place in teacher-student writing conferences, in which posture, line of sight, and gesture--as well as explicit comments from the teacher--can indicate approval and guide the student to alignment (Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, & Okada, 2007) towards a particular way of understanding writing conventions. We can also imagine that in

conversation certain threads or suggestions are picked up on or ignored, guiding the other towards the accepted way of knowing and seeing.

3. **In some cases, the source of information is evaluated.** In Latour and Woolgar's study, scientists would commonly refer to the skill and reliability of assistants and other scientists as a basis on which to evaluate the factuality of new findings.

Regarding written discourse conventions, the reliability of individuals proposing a particular interpretation might be evaluated based on their status or role within the institution, and the amount of background knowledge they hold. Textbooks might be evaluated based on the size and prestige of the publishing company and the background of the authors.

Thus, the world is revealed in particular ways, with some ways having more weight and authority than others. In terms of written discourse conventions, the weight of authority accumulates in two ways: 1) The number of inscriptions--textbooks, handouts, assigned readings--that support a particular version of the convention, and, 2) The status and assumed background knowledge of the individuals who support a particular version of the convention. Thus, as learners engage in triadic interaction, alignment to a way of understanding a written discourse convention is influenced by the weight of authority of the texts and individuals in the interaction. Individuals, as teachers or mentors, can be considered authoritative in themselves, but also establish alignment to particular ways of knowing by directing attention in some ways instead of others through instruction and corrective feedback, and by drawing on other sources to establish their view as fact. However, in the case where different teachers, mentors, textbooks, or assigned readings

present conflicting points of view, we might expect the view that is considered to be supported by more authoritative chains of inscriptions to take precedence.

In this study, I will investigate two second language learners in the process of learning how to write academic introductions. Taking an ecological approach as a foundation, I will examine variations in the written discourse conventions the participants encounter in their classes and coursework. Furthermore, I will investigate how these students negotiate variations in written discourse conventions, including to what extent the weight of authority and their own dispositional preferences play a role in the choices they make in their writing.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I first describe the original goals of the research project, and how these changed in response to limitations or difficulties in data collection, as well as through a reflexive response to the kinds of data collected at the site I eventually chose. I then explain the kinds of data collected, how the data were collected, and my approach to analyzing the data.

1. Evolution of the Research Project

1.1 Early Focus and Interests

When I began this research, I was originally interested in genre transfer across different contexts, and how learners reacted when encountering different generic writing practices. Previous research had shown that some learners resisted new writing practices (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Canagarajah, 2002; Carter, 2007; Casanave, 2002, 2010; Ivanic, 1998), while others transferred practices based on their previous experiences. These early experiences included school (Beaufort, 2007; Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Pare, 1999; Nowacek, 2011; Prior, 1998), extracurricular activities (Roozen, 2009), and work (Beaufort, 1997, 1999). I knew from this previous research that learners did not always passively reproduce the writing practices they encountered in new sites, and I was particularly influenced by work that showed how learners would take the writing

practices of one site and import them into another, often creatively meshing genre conventions.

In one such study of students learning writing practices in graduate and undergraduate programs at a mid-western university, Prior (1997, 1998) showed how students selected writing practices from different academic disciplines and applied them to new contexts. The students had their own preferences for certain ways of writing or certain ways of thinking about information, and they would take the genre practices of one field, such as cultural studies, and apply them in another field, such as history. The writing produced by the students in Prior's research was presented as a negotiation between the students' preferences, disciplinary conventions, and instructor acceptance and feedback. In Prior's work, writing transfer was not a matter of the extent to which students were *able* to apply what they learned, or whether the new site (a content-based course in an academic discipline or a workplace situation) actually used the same practices they had been prepared for (e.g., Dias et al., 1999; Russell, 1997). Prior was instead interested in what the students *wanted* to do, whether they aligned to or resisted the practices of a given discipline, and whether they would follow the practices docilely or recombine practices taken from other courses in innovative ways. In one example, Prior explained how a graduate student in an American Studies seminar took a historical, social class-based approach to the seminar paper that aligned more with his own interests and preferences rather than the geographic-studies approach favored by the professor (1997, 1998). I was interested in exploring these kinds of negotiations with a stronger emphasis on how second language writers of English encountered and responded to varying writing practices in English.

My original plan was to research workplace writing, in order to examine the transition from school to workplace (e.g., Dias et al., 1999). I wanted to examine how newcomers learn workplace writing conventions, how these differed from previously learned conventions, and how workplace writers might negotiate differences. I was also interested in examining this process particularly as it occurred for second language writers: How they might apply the rhetorical conventions of genres in their native language when writing in a second language, whether they would have a preference for particular conventions, and how they might negotiate a path between different cultural and workplace conventions.

Because I had taught in Japan for five years, I decided to travel there to conduct my research. Not only was I somewhat familiar with the culture and language abilities of Japanese writers, their workplace writing in English was also an area that had not been represented much in studies of second language writing, particularly qualitative research studies. Once I arrived in Japan, I initially scouted a few different workplace sites and conducted preliminary interviews with people who used English writing in their companies. However, I found that the English writing in these companies consisted mainly of simple emails, and in the cases where more complex writing was needed, the work was delegated to native speakers of English. The limitations of the available data led to the first major change in my research. I felt that restricting myself to workplace emails would not provide a very rich source of data for the kind of research I wanted to do, as the format of the emails was fairly simple, and the workers I talked to followed typical openings, closings, and expressions without variation. In cases where there was no predetermined format, the writers were able to piece something together based on

their previous general knowledge of English writing. They did not mention or show any resistance or creative meshing of genres, nor did there appear to be any conflict in how the writing was received. The limitations of this set of data led me to change my data collection plan and look to other locations.

1.2 Securing a Research Site and Changing Focus

Fortunately, at this time, I was able to secure a full time teaching position as the coordinator of the English courses in a new program in the International Studies department of a Japanese university. In the first year of this program, the students were required to take four English skills classes each semester, in addition to two other courses. I felt that it would be interesting to see how the students in this program would negotiate multiple influences--including writing teachers, several International Studies professors, textbooks, and several English skills courses taken concurrently--in composing their essays for their classes. As the coordinator of the English skills courses as well as one of the teachers, I was in a unique position of access to the different teachers. In advising the English instructors and consulting with the International Studies professors, I was able to get a wide view of the program and receive feedback regarding the students' overall progress. Because students would be learning about writing in several different English skills courses and applying them to other courses, I would be able to follow how they applied writing practices across different academic areas, including resistance to the writing practices of a class or creative reappropriation of practices from one class to another.

However, as I interviewed my student-participants, I found overall few indications of resistance or creative reappropriation. My student-participants would instead diligently learn the practices taught in the English skills classroom to the best of their ability, showing strong degrees of conformity to what they were taught. For the most part, rather than resisting a certain way of writing, or writing creatively, they aimed for accurate reproduction of the received forms and practices. Furthermore, they would adjust their practices in different classes, demonstrating a strong grasp of audience expectations. They might first experience some dissonance as they encountered a new form of writing or a contradiction in ideas about academic writing in different classes, but they would shrug this off and adapt quickly to the new demands. For example, if one instructor asserted that counterarguments were required in research papers while another instructor had no such requirement, or if one instructor claimed that use of “I” was not acceptable in academic writing while another professor accepted the use without comment, the student-participants, like savvy rhetoricians, would simply determine what the particular reader’s--i.e., the teacher’s--expectations were and write accordingly. Unlike the students in Prior’s studies, the student-participants did not take practices from one class and apply them intentionally in a new way in a different class. Instead, they conformed to the particular demands of each audience.

In addition, I found a particular point of frustration in my interviews. I found that the student-participants would at times contradict themselves, sometimes even in the course of a single interview. For example, when asked about whether it would be acceptable if a counterargument were removed from a research paper they had written, they might at different times respond affirmatively or negatively. This presented

difficulties for my data collection. Essentially, the participants' views were changing over time. But because I was approaching the data diachronically rather than as a trajectory of experience, I was unable to incorporate these findings into my emerging conceptual framework as it was. I felt that if the student-participants' understandings of writing expectations were not stable, it would be difficult for me to determine when they were favoring one practice or resisting another. I felt that if I could not determine clearly what the students' understandings and preferences about writing were, I could not take the additional step of examining in what ways they resisted or creatively reappropriated writing practices in different contexts.

At this point of frustration in my data collection, in a conversation with one of my advisors, he suggested I make these contradictions a central part of the study. Rather than demonstrating an understanding of disciplinary writing practices through a linear path towards mastery, my participants would change their ideas about what practices were required and how to use them. Though we might be able to expect an eventual settling and stability over the long term, at the present time their understanding was likely to fluctuate in a non-progressive, non-linear manner. With research papers for example, they might firmly commit to the necessity of counterarguments at one time, but at another time assert that they were unnecessary. Rather than the smooth appropriation of a particular writing practice followed by a conscious decision on how to apply it, the appropriation was likely to be rough and nonlinear. Once I shifted my attention this way, I also decided to look at the ideas about writing among the English instructors and the content professors in a different way, noticing the significant degree of variation within fields and disciplines. This led to a focus on written discourse conventions as variable,

and my interest turned to documenting these variations, and examining how the student-participants reacted to and negotiated these variations.

2. Setting and Participants

2.1 Setting

The research for this study was conducted at a private university in a large metropolitan city in Japan, with over 10,000 students enrolled as undergraduates. Within this university, a new department was established at the time of this study. Students enrolled in the department took courses in international relations (e.g., international law, regional economies, international migration), which were all conducted in English. The goal of the department was to prepare students for study abroad and for internationally-oriented careers both domestic and overseas. The department had student-exchange agreements with several universities outside of Japan.

The new department accepted around 50 new students each year for the first two years. While an attempt was made to appeal to international students, at the time of this study, the program consisted of over 90% Japanese students, with the remaining students entering from other Asian countries such as China and the Philippines. The program also included Japanese students--colloquially referred to as "returnees"--who had lived and attended school in native English-speaking countries such as the United States and Australia. A very small number of native English speakers from countries such as the U.S. and New Zealand were also enrolled in the program. While some students had very high

or native abilities in English, the average TOEFL ITP score of incoming students was around 500 at the time of this study.¹⁴

Students entering the program were required to take academic English skills courses in their first and second years of study. In the first year, these included year-long courses in academic reading and writing ("1st Year Writing"),¹⁵ oral presentation, lecture listening, and TOEFL preparation ("TOEFL and Presentation Skills I"), as well as a tutorial course that provided individualized support for the students' writing ("Writing Tutorial"). The first-year academic English program also included an additional year-long reading/writing course ("Integrated Studies") that provided support for another year-long content-based lecture course ("University Seminar"), which served as an introduction to undergraduate study, and presented readings and lectures on one topic from three different disciplinary perspectives.¹⁶ All incoming students were enrolled in a single section of the University Seminar lecture course. Three professors lectured for one-third of the University Seminar each semester on the topic from the perspective of their home discipline--see footnote 16. The students from the University Seminar were also divided into three separate discussion classes, which were each led by one of the professors from the University Seminar. The Integrated Studies courses were designed to help students process and write about the lectures and readings assigned in the University Seminar. Like the discussion sections, the students from the University Seminar lecture course

¹⁴ All incoming students were required to take an official TOEFL ITP exam at the beginning of the academic year, which was administered by the university. "ITP" refers to "Institutional Testing Program."

¹⁵ The course names have been changed for this study.

¹⁶ The topic was Islam for the first semester, and globalization for the second semester of the first year. The lectures on Islam were given from the perspectives of history, feminist studies, and migration studies. The lectures on globalization were given from the perspectives of cultural anthropology, economics, and international law.

were divided and assigned to one of three Integrated Studies sections. For both the University Seminar course discussion sections and Integrated Studies classes, the students were sorted based on their incoming TOEFL scores.

The two student-participants in this study were each enrolled in a different section of the Integrated Studies class. All other courses the student-participants took were the same.

2. 2 Participants

In this section, I give further details on the two-student participants selected for this study, Harumi and Nao.¹⁷ This background information includes their initial influences and inspiration for studying English, and their instruction in English prior to entering the university.

2.2.1 Harumi

Harumi was very studious, and was described as thoughtful and intelligent by her instructors. She got along well with her classmates, who sometimes looked to her for advice, but she felt intimidated at times about speaking in class because of the advanced English abilities of the returnees in her classes. Harumi displayed a high degree of self-awareness regarding her writing practices, and was very intent on improving her writing ability. She also seemed to invest a bit more ownership over her writing than the other student-participant, at times expressing personal preferences about writing in terms of likes and dislikes that were not apparent in the other student-participant's interviews.

¹⁷ Pseudonyms are used for both student-participants.

Harumi's older sister appeared to have had an influence on Harumi's interest in English. Harumi's sister began listening to American pop music in the 6th grade. Harumi also enjoyed the music, and became a fan of The Backstreet Boys. She explains, "Then, yes so that's the very start for me to be interested in English" (Harumi 1-10-2013 interview). Harumi's sister also provided some guidance on writing in English during the time between Harumi's high school graduation and entering university, through advice about writing essays for the TOEFL iBT. Her sister took preparation classes for the TOEFL iBT through a test preparation school, and she later passed along the textbooks she received from the schools to Harumi. Harumi also took a 10-day TOEFL iBT course at the same preparation school during summer break midway through her first year at the university.¹⁸ Though outside of the time frame of this study, Harumi later attended the same American university as her sister as part of her study-abroad requirement. She also expressed a strong interest in applied linguistics, which her sister had studied at the American university.

Harumi spoke of some exposure to English in elementary school, but this was limited to two hours a week. During this instruction, she sang English songs and watched movies in English with Japanese subtitles. She had no grammar instruction in these classes. Most of her education in English began in junior high school and high school. She explained that she did not have any classes that concentrated on writing in either English or Japanese, and she never used any English writing textbooks. She read English in her English classes, but the focus was not on larger organizational or rhetorical matters.

¹⁸ In the Japanese academic calendar, summer break occurs in the middle of the academic year, after the first semester, rather than at the end of the academic year.

She explained, “We were assigned to read one story, but in the class the professors asked us to translate only one sentence for each student, so it was not like we were reading one story.... So I don’t think those kind of classes are really nice” (Harumi 1-10-2013 interview). She also studied English grammar in her junior high and high school classes. Although her classes did not have specific writing instruction, she was given writing assignments over the vacation breaks. She commented,

I didn’t have English writing class. I just hand in some 2 or 3 English essays from high school, for like 3 years. So teachers did not told us to write the English essays so I didn’t know what the thesis statement is [until] just after I entered the university. So everything was new. (Harumi 5-21-2012 interview)

According to Harumi, her university classes provided her first exposure to thesis statements, topic sentences, introductions, and conclusions.

Harumi mentioned Japanese as having an influence on her writing in English. Not having had any explicit instruction on writing in English, Harumi “just wrote the English essay in the same way as Japanese essay” (Harumi 12-20-2011 interview).

Reflecting on her high school education, she commented,

Yeah, so my essay was really weird. But actually Japanese, Japanese teacher, I mean non-native English teacher in my high school, didn’t say my essay was not really good. Like they didn’t mention I didn’t have thesis statement, or my organization was not good. (Harumi 12-20-2011 interview)

Harumi did, however, receive some feedback on writing in Japanese. She explains that unlike in English, a delay of the main idea of the essay was preferred:

In Japanese we did not need to write thesis statement at the beginning of the paragraph. We just say our opinion in the conclusion. So that’s the biggest difference. And in English essay, we need to argue our opinion directly. But in Japanese, teachers prefer the--how can I say--not directly. (Harumi 12-20-2011 interview)

Japanese texts may also have had an implicit influence on her writing in English, guiding Harumi to write in particular ways that she only noticed later on reflection. For example, during an interview I asked Harumi why she chose to begin the introduction with a general historical background (as is sometimes found in English writing) in an essay she wrote. She speculated that Japanese literature may have been a possible influence in starting her introductions with general ideas or history, because she also used that style when she wrote in Japanese (Harumi interview 5-21-2012).

2.2.2 Nao

Nao was described as a good student by instructors in the program. She interacted well with others, and appeared to have many friends in the program. Like Harumi, she was also influenced by close relatives regarding her interest in English. According to Nao, her mother had a great deal of interest in English-speaking culture. Nao's mother was thus an early influence regarding English, as Nao explained: "She recommended me to learn English" (Nao 10-27-2011 interview). When Nao's mother was in high school, she had wanted to do a homestay in the U.S., but her own mother had not allowed her to. Nao's mother took a different approach when raising her daughter: "If I am curious about going foreign country, she always encourage me" (Nao 10-27-2011 interview). She introduced Nao to American television situation comedies and music. Like Harumi, Nao liked The Backstreet Boys: "I was really interested in them, since they looks cool. So in order to understand what they are saying, I started to translate their songs" (Nao 10-27-2011 interview).

In addition to her mother, Nao's older cousin also influenced her in learning English. This influence began in elementary school, when her cousin went to an American high school through an exchange program. Her mother also began encouraging her at this time, and asked her cousin to send American children's books such as *Curious George*, which Nao loved. Her cousin's influence continued as Nao grew older. Nao explained,

And so, for me she look like really cool because she finally became to be able to speak English almost perfectly. She went to university in America, and now she lives in America and she married with American people. Yes, so everything what she did was attractive for me. (Nao 10-27-2011 interview)

Nao only spoke briefly of her writing experience before entering university. She explained that in her high school classes, she wrote essays on simple topics, such as "who is the most effect person for you or something like that" (Nao 10-27-2011 interview). She learned how to write introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions, and topic sentences in her classes. She noted that her high school teachers did not focus on grammar very much, and contrasted their teaching with that of the TOEFL and Presentation Skills I instructor at the university, who checked the grammar of the students' TOEFL essay writing very carefully. She pointed out that she did not learn to use other written sources for support for her essays, or to write essays with counterarguments. Her high school essays were "really short essay" and "I just wrote my opinion, opinion, opinion, opinion" (Nao 5-23-2012 interview).

3. Data Collection

In this project, I used a case study approach (Duff, 2008; Lauer & Asher, 1988; Stake, 2005), in which I examined the writing practices of a small number of participants in detail. The participants changed over time, as some left the program and new participants were recruited. Although I began with participants of different nationalities, including American and Filipino, the final two participants are both Japanese. The data discussed in this study represents information collected during their first year in the program, with brief follow-up interviews in their second year.

The data I collected, described in more detail below, included interviews with student-participants and instructors,¹⁹ textbooks and handouts used in classes, samples of student-participants' writing, and written feedback from instructors on the student-participants' writing over their first year of study at the university. In addition, six lectures of the University Seminar were observed. I was unfortunately unable to observe the writing courses, because I was scheduled to teach at the same time those courses were held. Memos and field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994) written by me as a researcher and instructor in the program during the investigation were also used as sources for data analysis.

I will next describe the kinds of data I collected, starting with the textual data and then moving on to the process of collecting interview data from the student-participants and instructors.

¹⁹ Although three English-skills instructors and three non-English-skill professors were interviewed during data collection, the interview data are not included in this study. Where I do include data from the instructors--in all cases limited to their written feedback on student essays--I give brief contextual background information about them.

3.1 Textual Data Collected

The students learned written discourse conventions from several sources at the university. I collected data from the following sources in this study:

1. Writing textbooks. The participants used two textbooks that explicitly gave instruction on academic written discourse conventions in English. The first textbook--assigned in the 1st Year Writing class--was *Sourcework: Academic Writing from Sources* (Dollahite & Haun, 2012),²⁰ a writing textbook published in the U.S. that was aimed towards students who already had some competence in writing English, but the textbook did not refer to ESL students per se. According to the authors, “*Sourcework* is designed for upper-intermediate to advanced students who have had some exposure to basic rhetorical styles, and have experience writing essays with a thesis statement and supporting points” (p. xi). However, the second edition of the textbook makes specific reference to ESL learners, explaining that “*Sourcework* provides solutions to several critical challenges faced by ESL students and their teachers in advanced writing courses” (p. xi).

In addition, the TOEFL and Presentation Skills I course used *Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT* (Edmunds, McKinnon, & Zeter, 2009). This textbook covered the four skill areas (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) needed for the TOEFL iBT. Most of the course was focused on reading, listening, and speaking sections of the test, so only a few weeks were spent on the writing portion of the test.

2. Assigned readings. In addition to the writing textbooks, the student-participants also encountered written discourse conventions in assigned readings--articles

²⁰ This edition was released just before the students started the program.

and book chapters that students used as background information and support for their arguments in writing.²¹ The assigned readings could shape perception and understanding of written discourse conventions both explicitly and implicitly. Knowledge of writing practices could be shaped explicitly when assigned readings were used as samples or models of writing by instructors in classes, with attention directed to specific features. Knowledge of writing practices was shaped implicitly through exposure to conventions, forming an unconscious understanding of discursive forms (Krashen, 1985), and offering an unconscious model which may then be reproduced and enacted without explicit conscious awareness of form and features (Bourdieu, 1990/1980).

3. Written teacher feedback on essays. In each of the courses in which the student-participants submitted writing assignments, they received varying degrees of teacher written feedback on their writing. For example, in the 1st Year Writing course and the first semester of the University Seminar, the student-participants submitted at least one early draft for feedback before revising for a final draft for each of their assigned essays. On the other hand, in the Integrated Studies class and the second semester of the University Seminar, no preliminary drafts of writing assignments were submitted for feedback, but some form of feedback was usually given on final drafts (though two professors in the University Seminar chose not to give feedback on the assignments they received).

²¹ Although the participants were exposed to a range of written texts in English both before and during the time period of this study, I was unable to obtain a complete set of their readings for all classes. The texts discussed here will be limited to the readings given in the first year of the University Seminar.

3.2 Interviews with Student-Participants

The interviews were conducted between October, 2011 and January, 2013. The participants were interviewed every two or three weeks in the first year of data collection, and on average once a month in the second year. Each interview lasted roughly one hour. Interviews were conducted in my office on campus.

The interviews were conducted using varied kinds of questions suggested in qualitative research methodology (Doheny-Farina & Odell, 1985; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Spradley, 1979). Before the interview, I prepared topics to discuss, often based on the student-participants' responses in previous interviews. These topics were then used to generate specific questions for the student-participants. Following a semi-structured approach to interviewing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), I used these questions only as a general guide, and was open to the topics the students raised themselves. That is, I asked follow-up questions based on these topics, as well as *probing questions* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), in which I offered statements such as "Tell me more about...." in order to encourage the student-participants to expand on a topic in their own way. Additional kinds of questions included *descriptive* and *contrast* questions (Spradley, 1979). For example, I would ask the student-participants to describe the program, or to describe how they composed an introduction to an essay. Alternatively, I might ask them what the difference was between an essay they had written for one professor compared to that for another professor. I would also ask *mini-tour questions* (Spradley, 1979), having the student-participants guide me step by step through topics such as how a writing class was typically conducted, or the process of writing their essays. Although we were all in the same program either as students or professors, I asked interviewees questions that

encouraged them to respond as if I was an uninformed observer, what Spradley calls a “native language explanation” (p. 59). For example, I asked them to explain the Integrated Studies class to me as if I were a new student or a new professor. This enabled me to obtain more detailed responses that depended less on preexisting assumptions about the context or objects of study on either my part or the part of my interviewees.

When interviewing student-participants about their own writing, I used a discourse-based method (Doheny-Farina & Odell, 1985; Odell, Goswami, & Herrington, 1983; Odell, Goswami, Herrington & Quick, 1983; Prior, 1998). I asked the student-participants specific questions about the choices they made in their writing, while also suggesting alternative moves, audiences, or contexts, and asking how they would respond to them. For example, if a student included a counterargument in their essay, I would ask for their thoughts about the essay if they had left that part out.

In the following sections, I will explain how I analyzed the data I collected with an awareness of my own positionality as a researcher, and how the concept of reflexivity informed my orientation to the data. I will then outline the process and methods I used to code the data.

4. Analyzing the Data

4.1 Approach to Data Analysis

Following a qualitative approach, I analyzed the data with an awareness of how my own perspectives and values shaped not only the kind of data I collected but also how I would interpret the results (Atkinson, 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Sullivan & Porter, 1997). I attempted to be open to the

participants' own interests and allow these to guide the interviews, but at the same time my background affected not only what I noticed, but also how I interpreted it. I had lived and worked in Japan for five years as an English teacher, which gave me an understanding of Japanese culture that was more than a novice's. I had also taught ESL in the U.S. for seven years, which, combined with my experience teaching in Japan, affected the kinds of questions I asked, such as those related to pedagogy, learning, and motivation. As a doctoral student with an undergraduate and graduate background in political theory and postmodern thought, I came with not only an interest in larger theoretical themes but also a perspective of knowledge as socially constructed, though this was something that I was beginning to question at the time. These are just a few of the undoubtedly countless ways that my own trajectory of experience shaped how I approached the site. Moreover, having developed a prospectus for my doctoral study, I already had some preconception of what I would be looking for, though I tried to keep this to a minimum. Nevertheless, the questions and concerns of my discipline informed how I approached the data. As such, the data collected represents the lives and concerns of the participants, but have necessarily been guided by my own life experience as well as past and current conversations within my discipline.

Yet this dichotomous framework does not accurately represent the mutual theory-building that occurred during my data collection. While the student-participants' opinions and experiences did not entirely drive my research questions and conclusions, neither did my own interests shape the data in such a way that I was able to merely confirm what I

had already suspected.²² What occurred instead was a process of reflexive feedback in which the information I collected led to changes in what I was looking for and how I looked at it. My own notions shaped the data collected but were also limited by the site, so that I had to be receptive to what the site had to offer and alter the lens I used as well as the information I attempted to collect.

I originally expected to follow Prior's (1998) work in examining and presenting student writers' learning of disciplinary practices as a process that was filled with conflict and creative reappropriation. However, my participants did not show a strong affinity for any particular practice, and did not show any struggle over ownership of a personal style of expression. Moreover, the student-participants' understanding of writing practices changed often, showing that their learning was not a linear process of mastery but one of shifting understandings and perspectives of practices. With these findings, I was compelled to reconsider my orientation to the research, moving from a framework of appropriation to one in which conventions were revealed differently by different sources, prompting changing understandings of how they were used.

In this way, my data analysis was circular and dynamic, not only top-down or bottom-up, but a continuous movement between the two, with each feeding back to the other. From a bottom-up orientation, I saw that instead of agreement on the form and function of written discourse conventions among instructors and textbooks in the English courses, there were a fair number of differences of opinion--variations in how written discourse conventions were taught and described. These variations came as a surprise to me. Although I expected variation in *how* written discourse conventions were taught and

²² I explain this in more detail earlier in section 1.2 of this chapter.

described, I expected more agreement over their general features and organization. These findings interacted with the previous top-down knowledge of generic writing practices and discourse communities I entered the location with, as well as my disciplinary orientations. My own expectations still filtered what I paid attention to, but the findings regarding the things I was attending to also required me to modify my expectations.

This circular process in which my expectations were balanced by the data that arose from the situation also affected the things I chose to attend to. Initially, my focus was on genres of academic writing, such as the report or essay. My participants, however, were more preoccupied with smaller features of written communication, such as whether to use “I think” when writing a thesis statement. They also did not refer to particular genres or kinds of writing, instead speaking of practices such as thesis statements and introductions as universal aspects of academic English writing not associated with genres.²³ This changed the kinds of categories I used for my data, broadening my attention to various levels of writing. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) note that in the ethnographic tradition, “The categories that are used for interpreting what people say or do...are generated out of the process of data analysis” (p. 3). As I shifted my attention to different levels of writing, a category emerged that became a central focus of my research: written discourse conventions (Atkinson, 1991). For the most part, I attended to the written discourse conventions that were specifically referred to by student-participants and written sources. Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, and Clark (2008) note that “Whether a phenomenon gets recognized as ‘factual information’ depends less on its

²³ An exception is the practice of counterargument, which the student-participants referred to in association with research papers.

de facto existence than on its significance to a particular community" (p. 409). In one case, however, in what I referred to as a contrastive statement (see Chapter 4, Section 4), I focused on a convention that was not mentioned by the student-participants nor found in explicit textbook instruction. Instead, I found the feature in assigned readings, textbook examples, and the student-participants' essays. While I could have ignored this feature, in this study I was also interested in how the unconscious, implicit elements of the environment not directly attended to also played an ambient (Rickert, 2004), unconscious role in shaping the use of written discourse conventions. As a result, rather than ignoring these data, I included them as an example of how the environment may have subconscious effects on how writing is produced.

4.2 Coding the Data

The data were coded with the goal of letting the student-participants reveal what was significant to their writing processes, balanced with my own research orientations and interests (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sullivan & Porter, 1997, 2004). Early on in the research, I asked general questions about their university program and their courses, and how they were adjusting to university life and academic writing, in order to be open to the student-participants' own interests and concerns. I then attended to the particular writing practices that the student-participants were concerned about, such as the use of "I" in academic English writing, or whether counterarguments were necessary components of research papers. Due to constraints of time and space, I eventually narrowed my focus to their concerns about essay introductions.

The interests and concerns of the student-participants intersected with my own research preparation, resulting in a process of coding (Lauer & Asher, 1988; Saldana, 2009) that reflected my particular background as an academic literacy researcher. After initial interviews, I created some pre-coding categories (Saldana, 2009) based on particular writing practices I was interested in and the different classes and professors that came up in the interviews. Then, I reviewed the transcripts to find topics, themes, and patterns that emerged across successive sessions either with one participant or across participants. I reviewed transcripts over time and re-coded based on new patterns and topics that emerged in the interviews, which resulted in new codes based on my updated perspectives (Miles & Huberman 1994, Saldana, 2009). In addition, I reviewed the transcripts using different coding methods (Saldana, 2009), going through sets of transcripts once for each coding method. I used NVivo 9 qualitative data analysis software to compile interview transcripts and identify patterns in the coded data. After experimenting with several different coding methods suggested by Saldana (2009), I narrowed down my codes into three general categories:

1. Topic codes (e.g., "writing experience," "thesis statement," "introduction")
2. In vivo codes (e.g., "flexible," "boring," "childish")
3. Belief/value codes (e.g., "English writing is direct," "Counterargument makes your opinion stronger," "TOEFL essay doesn't need background introduction")

Documents were coded based on coding that originated in the interview transcripts, but new codes based on data in the documents themselves also provided new points of discussion during interviews, and informed the questions I raised in subsequent interviews. Coding of documents, coding of interview transcripts, and discourse-based

interviews recursively interlaced with each other, as codes based on one source would serve as codes for another source.

Finally, looking through the coded data, I selected information that would support my emerging conceptual framework, with the information reflexively reforming the framework during the process of selection. While my own background and interests played a role in the selection, it was an interactive process, such that my selection was also guided by how my attention was directed by the data from the student-participants and texts. The points of interest that resulted from the process of resorting and revising became the basis for my data analysis, which I present in Chapters 4 and 5. More specifically, in Chapter 4, I will present data based on texts collected, including student essays, writing textbooks, and assigned readings for the University Seminar. Then, in Chapter 5, I will present my interview data, which shows how the student-participants interacted with the ideas about written discourse conventions they encountered in the texts and in classroom instruction.

CHAPTER 4: VARIATIONS IN THE PRESENTATION OF ACADEMIC INTRODUCTIONS

In the following data analysis, I will focus on one set of written discourse conventions--those that concern academic introductions--and examine how introductions and their parts were presented to the student-participants through various pedagogical channels--textbooks, teacher instruction and feedback, and assigned readings. As will be seen, there was substantial variation in how introductions were presented, and the messages that students received.

The sources of information the student-participants encountered had differences in both the selection of features of introductions, and how these features were explained. These features included "hooks," thesis statements, and contrastive statements. While some sources (teachers and classroom materials) pointed out the existence and necessity of a feature, others omitted it. The hook, discussed by only one textbook, is an example of this. Other features were presented as necessary by more than one source, but what was considered a proper or effective way of writing them varied among sources. Thesis statements, discussed in different ways in textbooks and in written teacher feedback, are examples of this.

Variations in introductions that are associated with different genres or kinds of writing will be examined in this chapter. In the writing textbooks analyzed, these include

introductions for two kinds of TOEFL essays, a “response” essay, and a research paper. Assigned readings for the University Seminar, including book chapters from edited collections, book chapters from single-authored books, academic journal articles, and an article from a website, will also be examined.²⁴

The features of introductions that will be discussed below are the following:

1. Thesis statements

- 1.1 Inclusion of thesis statement in the introduction

- 1.2 Specificity of the thesis statement

- 1.3 Acceptability of "there exist (number) reasons" thesis statement

2. Acceptability of a "will do" statement

3. Inclusion of hooks

4. Contrastive statements

1. Thesis Statements

A common feature of introductions in many forms of academic writing in English is a statement that gives a topic plus a predication, or position on the topic, of the work as a whole. Johns (1997) explains a common belief shared by many English-using universities in the world that "topic and argument should be prerevealed in the introduction" (p. 58). Similarly, Elbow (1991) describes signposting--"explaining what [the author] is going to do and laying out the structure" (p. 144)--as a common convention in academic writing, and notes that the placement of a signpost at the end of the introduction is "particularly conventional" (p. 144). For the purposes of this study, I

²⁴ Twenty-three assigned readings were collected. The page length for readings ranged from 15 to 20 pages.

will refer to thesis statements as one or two sentences that signpost the topic and argument of the work as a whole. Using this definition as a heuristic, we will see that there are variations in whether such statements are included as features of introductions, as well as variations in form and the degree of specificity that is required of them.

1.1 Inclusion of Thesis Statements in Introductions

We find differences between the textbooks and instructors over whether a thesis statement is a necessary feature of introductions. *Sourcework* describes some form of signposting in introductions for two kinds of writing, a response paper and a research paper, but this signposting is only described as a thesis for the research paper.

Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT designates thesis statements as necessary for the Independent Writing Task of the TOEFL but not the Integrated Writing Task. In addition, 65% of the assigned readings include thesis statements, including topic and argument. While one instructor, Alice, advised including thesis statements, another instructor, Mika, advised against their inclusion in introductions.

1.1.1 Inclusion of Thesis Statements in *Sourcework*

Sourcework first describes introductions in relation to a specific kind of writing referred to as a “response” (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 17). Responses are described as short essays which give opinions and reactions to a text that has been read. When introductions to this kind of essay are described, no mention is made of thesis statements. The authors only advise to include the author name and article title, and “A paraphrase of the specific point from the article that you plan to discuss. You may also want to include

a quote of the idea you are discussing” (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 17). We find a topic given in the introduction, but no indication is given of the writer's opinion or argument. In an example that follows this explanation, the body of the sample essay continues on to give a personal opinion about the author’s main point, but no reference to the student writer’s opinion or an argument is given in the introduction.

On the other hand, *Sourcework* introduces thesis statements as a prominent part of the research paper about midway through the textbook. Three features of introductions are given there, the last of which is “State your thesis” (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 101). The textbook then presents an example introduction, and explains that “The last sentence of the paragraph is the thesis statement, which commonly, though not always, appears at the conclusion of the introduction” (p. 102). Thesis statements are described as "a concise one-sentence answer to your research question" (p. 47), which "defines the topic and focus of your paper" (p. 47). An example thesis statement for a research question about why people become homeless is given: "The lack of affordable housing, inadequate public assistance, and the breakdown of the family are three causes of homelessness"(p. 47). Here we find the topic to be causes of homelessness, and the predication to be that the causes are lack of affordable housing, inadequate public assistance, and the breakdown of the family.

1.1.2 Inclusion of Thesis Statements in *Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT*

In *Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT*, we also find that thesis statements are indicated as a feature of introductions for one kind of writing but not another. The TOEFL exam has two kinds of writing: the Integrated Writing Task and the Independent

Writing Task. The Integrated Writing Task involves reading a short passage on a topic, and then listening to a brief lecture on the same passage, after which a question prompt is given. The textbook offers the following example prompt for the task: “Summarize the points made in the lecture you just heard, explaining how they cast doubts on points made in the reading” (Edmunds, McKinnon, & Zeter, 2009, p. 438). The guidance given in the textbook for writing essays for both kinds of tasks is notably minimal. The textbook does not give direct instructions on introductions for the Integrated Writing Task, but offers a “sample outline” of an essay response which includes an introduction. Only three features are given for introductions, listed in order as *topic*, *main idea of the reading passage*, and *main idea of the lecture* (Edmunds, McKinnon, & Zeter, 2009, p. 438). No mention is made of thesis statements.

For the Independent Writing Task, students are given a brief question or statement and asked to respond with their opinion. The instructions in the textbook for this task are also minimal. Two patterns for introductions are given, both of which include thesis statements. The first pattern offers only *topic* and *thesis statement* as features (Edmunds, McKinnon, & Zeter, 2009, p. 440), while the second pattern gives only “restatement of the question” (Edmunds, McKinnon, & Zeter, 2009, p. 503) and *thesis statement* as features. No further explanation of thesis statements is given. These patterns are merged and summarized in a brief text box entitled “Characteristics of a good introduction” (p. 529), in which the following characteristics are given in bullet point form:

- one paragraph (three to five sentences)
- an introduction to the general topic of the essay
- includes the thesis statement and a restatement of the question

- includes points that will be discussed or elaborated on in the body. (p. 529)

1.1.3 Inclusion of Thesis Statements in Instructor Feedback

One student-participant reported a difference in opinion between instructors regarding whether to include thesis statements in introductions. In reference to the second semester of her 1st Year Writing class, the student-participant Harumi commented, “At the beginning of last semester, Mika²⁵ also say we should write the thesis statement in introduction. But from the beginning of this semester, I’m not sure but she changed” (Harumi 12-20-2011 interview). She noted, however, that her Integrated Studies instructor asked for a thesis at the end of the introduction of an essay: “Alice told us we need a kind of plan or conclusion of the essay, at the end of the first paragraph” (Harumi 4-19-2012 interview).

1.1.4 Inclusion of Thesis Statements in Assigned Readings

The assigned readings for the University Seminar crossed four genres. Within each genre, rather than displaying strict conformity to a fixed norm, they demonstrated varying degrees of inclusion of thesis statements in introductions. Thus, 15 out of 23 (65%) of the assigned readings for the University Seminar as a whole included thesis statements. Of these, 3 of the 5 chapters from edited collections (60%) and 9 out of 13 chapters drawn from single-authored books (69%) included thesis statements. All of the three academic journal articles also included thesis statements. The remaining text, a website article, did not have a thesis statement.

²⁵ The instructors' names are all pseudonyms.

In its inclusion or exclusion of thesis statements, each source--whether textbook, assigned reading, or instructor--offered a different way of knowing introductions, which had a potential implicit influence on how the student-participants would come to understand introductions.

1.2. Specificity of the Thesis Statement

In this subsection, it will be shown that textbooks and instructors offered different advice about how specific thesis statements should be. A more general, non-specific thesis gives only a brief statement of the argument of the overall work. A thesis statement becomes more specific as it describes the argument in more detail, in some cases explicitly specifying the sub-points of the argument.

1.2.1 Specificity in *Sourcework*

Both *Sourcework* and *Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT* give advice about writing thesis statements, encouraging more specific theses. Thus, *Sourcework* offers the following guidelines for constructing a thesis statement:

1. It states your topic and focus, which answer your research question.
2. It gives an overview of your supporting points, which are logically connected to your focus.
3. It gives enough information without too much detail. (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 46)

In instruction #2--to give an overview of supporting points--we find that a specific listing of ideas is advised. In the example thesis statements accompanying these instructions, we find a specific and sometimes quantitative listing of main ideas, such as the following: "Belief in romantic love, the division of family responsibilities, and

attitudes toward divorce *are three differences between American and Indian expectations of marriage*” (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 47) (italics in original). Examples of strong and weak thesis statements are then given, emphasizing the need for a specific listing of main points, and deterring students from briefer statements of argument or opinion. One such example is the following:

Weak Thesis Statement:

The United States has a lot of crime.

Stronger Thesis Statement:

The rising crime rate in the United States has caused a loss of talented young people to crime, high government costs for law enforcement, and a drop in tourism. (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 54)

The textbook further offers the following example as a weak thesis statement:

Weak Thesis Statement:

Three types of crime have been increasing in U.S. cities. (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 54)

The authors follow this example with a comment: “By briefly describing as supporting points the types of crimes that have increased, the writer can have a more effective thesis statement that tells the reader what kinds of crime she will be discussing” (p. 54). The textbook then gives a revised version:

Stronger Thesis Statement:

Three types of crime have been increasing in U.S. cities: personal assault, car robbery, and home burglary. (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 54)

1.2.2 Specificity in *Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT*

Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT also encourages a degree of specificity in thesis statements. The textbook gives the following advice for writing thesis statements

for the Independent Writing Task section of the TOEFL exam: “For your thesis, do not write, ‘I agree with this opinion.’ Restate the question when giving your opinion, such as ‘I agree that when people reach a certain age, they should no longer be able to drive’” (Edmunds, McKinnon, & Zeter, 2009, p. 521). The authors further advise, “Do NOT start with a statement that is too general; a more specific statement better sets up the information to follow” (p. 529). While the textbook does not directly advise listing the main ideas of the essay as *Sourcework* does, it recommends that a thesis statement be developed in more detail than a brief statement of opinion.

1.2.3 Specificity in Instructor Feedback

Three instructors indicated the need for specificity in their written feedback on the student-participants' essays. In the following example, one University Seminar instructor, Saki, was unsatisfied with the degree of specificity in Nao's thesis statement. For her second essay for the University Seminar in the first semester, Nao had written an essay based on a prompt that asked her to discuss the similarities and differences in views of sexuality between Islam and the West. Her introduction ended with the following thesis statement: “According to authors who are writing about gender, there exist differences and similarities how women's bodies and sexual activities controlled between the Islamic country and the west” (Nao Take-home Essay #2, 1st semester, 7/19/2011). In this thesis statement, Nao offered the argument or opinion that differences and similarities exist between Islam and the West regarding women and sexuality, but did not specify what those differences and similarities were. Saki's written comment on the essay recommended she give more information, asking her to make a choice between

differences and similarities, and offer her comments on that choice. In written feedback at the end of the essay, Saki wrote, “The opening is OK, but it would be even stronger if you could give the reader a better idea of what you think about the comparison: are differences or similarities larger in your mind? - for example” (Nao Take-home essay, second semester, 7/19/2011) (*Underlining in original*). In sum, for Saki, Nao’s original thesis statement was too general, and did not offer enough specific information on her thoughts on the topic or enough preview of the body of the essay.

One of the Integrated Studies instructors, Alice, also advised one of the student-participants to be more specific. Harumi had written a thesis statement in an essay responding to a prompt that asked whether she agreed or disagreed that the world was becoming more culturally homogenized. Although she staked out a clear position, this was considered not specific enough by Alice. That is, Harumi wrote in the last sentence of the introduction, “Therefore, the world would not be converged without diverge and hybridize and I disagree with the idea that the world will converge completely in the future” (Harumi Integrated Studies Essay #1, 2nd semester, 10/22/2011). In the margin next to this sentence, Alice wrote, “Try to be specific when stating your opinion. :)” For Alice, a simple statement of agreement or disagreement was therefore not enough. She asked for more specific information about why Harumi disagreed, appearing to want more information about the main ideas in the body of the essay.

In the following example from one of Nao’s essays, another Integrated Studies instructor, Steve, also asked for specificity while seeming to reject the form of thesis given in *Sourcework*. We saw above that examples of strong thesis statements in *Sourcework* included a listing of the main ideas of the body of the essay. In an essay for

Steve's Integrated Studies class, Nao wrote, "There exist three reasons why African traditional religions differ from Islam and Christianity and men and women have balance. The three reasons are about secret society, diviner and God" (Nao Integrated Studies Essay #4, 1st semester, 6/24/2011). Steve commented in the margin next to the final sentence: "No list. Explain these" (*Underlining in original*). As part of his summarizing comments at the end of the essay, he also wrote, "Be sure to explain exactly what your thesis is rather than listing words." Although Nao's original thesis resembled the examples given in *Sourcework*, listing the reasons she would discuss in her essay, Steve recommended she not list her ideas, and asked her to give more explanation about the reasons in her thesis.

While these instructors were similar in their desire for specificity in thesis statements, another instructor from the University Seminar appeared to not require such specificity at all. In the following thesis from the student-participant Harumi, she wrote a statement that differences exist, but did not offer any further elaboration, similar to the earlier thesis from Nao just discussed. Harumi wrote, "The Arabs and the French are similar in terms of ways that made people who were conquered put into their community after wars; the former 'Islamized' and the latter 'Europeanized'. However, as a matter of fact, the former one was completely different from the latter one" (Harumi Take-home essay #1, 1st semester, 6/7/2011). In a more specific thesis statement, a reader could expect Harumi to explain more specifically how the conquered people were assimilated into French and Arab communities respectively, rather than simply stating that a difference existed. However, the introduction as a whole elicited considerable praise from Richard, one of the University Seminar instructors: "Very nicely set up first

paragraph. You create a general assumption, and then present your argument. May I use it as an example to show other students? I will keep your name private if you prefer, but others would benefit from seeing this.” Through his approval of the introduction as a whole, Richard also implicitly accepted the lack of specificity in the thesis statement, contrasting with the demand for greater specificity from the other instructors.

1.3 Acceptability of “There Exist (Number) Reasons” Thesis

A final kind of thesis was found in relation to feedback from the instructor, Mika. The form of this thesis begins with “There exist,” and then gives the number of reasons that will follow. This also appears to have been taught in her 1st Year Writing class. Thus, it appeared in several of the essays Nao wrote in her first semester, and was recommended in written feedback from Mika, her 1st Year Writing instructor, in a later essay. It did not appear in the textbooks for the class or in other instructors’ comments, and it was in fact actively proscribed by one instructor. Thus, as mentioned earlier, in an early essay for the Integrated Studies class, the final two sentences of Nao’s introduction stated, “There exist three reasons why African traditional religions differ from Islam and Christianity and men and women have balance. The three reasons are about secret society, diviner and God” (Nao Integrated Studies Essay #4, first semester, 6/24/2011). Steve, the instructor for the course, did not write a comment, but indicated that the phrase was unacceptable by drawing a line through the words “There exist three reasons why.”

In contrast, Mika not only accepted but also recommended this phrase as part of the thesis statement in her written comments on a later essay from Nao in her 1st Year Writing class. In the final sentence of her introduction, Nao had written, “For the two

reasons, I tell you about free trade and lack of own thought" (Nao Globalization essay 2nd draft, first semester, 6/30/2011). In the margin next to the final sentence, Mika wrote, "Begin this thesis with 'There exist two reasons why....'" In the next draft, Nao revised her thesis statement as follows: "There exist two reasons why I believe there are negative aspect of globalization: free trade and lacking own culture" (Nao Globalization essay 3rd draft, 1st semester, n.d.). The contrast between Steve's and Mika's feedback showed different ways of understanding the thesis statement, with certain phrases considered more acceptable than others.

2. Acceptability of a "Will Do" Statement

By using the phrase "will do" statement, I refer to statements that give a topic that will be discussed, without commenting on the topic. In contrast with thesis statements, a "will do" statement gives the topic of the essay, but delays the opinion or argument until later in the essay. One class handout and written feedback from instructors including myself claimed different positions regarding the acceptability of "will do" statements. These statements were often in the final sentence of students' introductions, and included variations of phrases such as "I am going to" or "I will." For all of the essay assignments, the students were asked to give an opinion or take a position on an issue, leading to a thesis statement. The "will do" statement, when used, took the place of a thesis statement, indicating only the general topic that would be discussed.

2.1 "Will Do" Statements in Handouts and Feedback from Instructors

While the acceptability of this statement in place of a thesis statement was not addressed in the students' course textbooks, the instructors expressed different opinions on this subject. Thus, in a handout on TOEFL writing given by the instructor Kotaro in the TOEFL & Presentation Skills I class, the kind of phrasing used in “will do” statements was specifically addressed as unnecessary: “When writing an essay, it is not necessary to write ‘In this essay, I will write about...’ or ‘Now, I want to talk about...’” (*translated from original Japanese* - TOEFL handout, n.d.). In my own Integrated Studies course, I expressed similar feelings in my written feedback to students. In the following thesis statement from an essay written by Kimiko, a student in my Integrated Studies class,²⁶ in which she responded to the question of whether or not Taiwan should be recognized as an independent nation state, she had written: “Thus, this paper focuses on Taiwan and figure out it will be independent country or not” (Kimiko Integrated Studies Essay #5, 2nd semester, 12/19/2011). Although she had not used a phrase such as “I will,” this statement had the same function of giving the topic without commenting on it, alluding to an opinion that would come in the body of the essay. In my comment, I highlighted the final sentence and wrote, “It’s better to give your opinion, rather than to say what you will do in the thesis statement.”

In contrast, we find acceptance of a version of the “will do” statement in written feedback from Alice, and also examples of this kind of statement in the assigned readings for the University Seminar. Thus, in an essay assignment for Alice’s Integrated Studies

²⁶ Kimiko (a pseudonym) was another student interviewed for this study, but as I only include this excerpt from my feedback on one of her essays, I do not give background information on her in Chapter 3.

class, Harumi was asked to compare the different views of Islam expressed by two authors. At the end of the introduction, she wrote, "Now, I am going to analyze two authors' positions on Islam with some citations from these descriptions" (Harumi Integrated Studies Essay #1, 1st semester, 5/27/2011). However, this was not much more than a restatement of the assignment prompt, without any additional information about the findings or the main ideas that were to be discussed regarding the comparison. In a comment in the margins next to the introduction, Alice wrote, "Good intro," implying acceptance of this kind of thesis.

2.2 "Will Do" Statements in Assigned Readings

In 3 out of 23 (13%) of the assigned readings for the University Seminar, we also find versions of the "will do" statement. In some cases, a "will do" statement is given because the reading offers a description of events or a situation rather than an argument, so no argument or opinion is given. An example of a "will do" statement can be found in an assigned book chapter that described how women were portrayed in African traditional religions, entitled "Women in African Traditional Religions" (Mbon, 1987). At the beginning of the chapter, the author wrote, "It is our aim in this chapter, therefore, to try in some way to offset the imbalance that usually characterizes the treatment of the subject of women in world religions" (p. 7). While the statement gives a sense of the topic and purpose, clarifying how women are portrayed in African traditional religions, the main idea or argument was not stated until the conclusion of the chapter.²⁷ In the

²⁷ Although the statement does not use the phrases "I will" or "I am going to," it follows the "will do" statement in giving a topic without a clear indication of the argument or opinion of the work as a whole.

conclusion, we find that the argument was that women play important social roles in African traditional religions. In this particular “will do” statement, we thus have a sense of the topic and purpose, but the author’s opinion was delayed until later in the essay.

3. Inclusion of Hooks

One feature of introductions that was discussed in *Sourcework* but not mentioned in instructor feedback or other writing instruction materials is the “hook.” The authors of *Sourcework* explain that the hook “grabs your reader’s attention and directs it toward what you have to say” (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 102). The textbook offers the following descriptions of hooks:

1. Use a quotation or surprising fact or statistic from your sources that relates to the focus of your topic.
2. Describe a problem, dilemma, or controversy associated with your topic.
3. Tell a story.
4. Relate a personal reason for your interest in the topic.
5. Define a word that is central to your topic.
6. Make a historical comparison or contrast. (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 102)

Since hooks are considered a central feature of introductions in *Sourcework*, we could expect to find several in the assigned readings. However, the kinds of hooks described in *Sourcework* were found in only 2 out of 23 assigned readings. Although only found in a limited number of sources, this feature offers another illustration of differences and variations in descriptions of introductions the student-participants encountered.

4. Contrastive Statements

Contrastive statement is the term I will use for a statement which presents an unexpected or contrary view to the statement before it. John Swales describes a similar feature in relation to research article introductions (1990), which typically use contrastive linguistic markers like "however" to indicate a gap in the existing literature on the topic of the writer's research. In the following examples, we also find such statements being used for other purposes, such as setting up a contrary opinion or counterargument. In order to include these additional purposes, I refer to these statements as *contrastive statements*. Swales notes the use of words such as *however*, *nevertheless*, *unfortunately*, and *but*, which he refers to as "adversative sentence connectors" (1990, p. 154), as performing a similar function. *Contrastive statements* were not discussed directly by either instructors or textbooks. However, they were found in the assigned readings, examples in textbooks, and student-participants' essays.

While no textbooks directly referred to contrastive statements in their instructions for writing an introduction, these statements were found in examples in *Sourcework*. One such example, found under the heading "Example of an Effective Introduction" (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 101), begins with historical examples of executions in France, ancient Rome, and the U.S., and then continues as follows: "Capital punishment has been a useful and powerful tool to protect justice and deter crime. However, in the last half of the 20th century, the death penalty has faced increasing opposition" (*Underline added*) (p. 101). The sentences that follow then describe opposition to the death penalty, ending with the author's own opinion. Thus, in the contrastive statement

in this example, the author presents an opinion contrary to that found in the preceding sentences.

Likewise, *Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT* does not give direct attention to contrastive statements, but includes them in the two full sample student essays given in the textbook as well as in the accompanying reading passages. For instance, in the sample essay for the Independent Writing Task, the introduction begins with a general statement on the topic, followed by the author's contrasting opinion and a thesis statement: "Many students believe that it is better to go to universities close to where they live. However, I do not agree with this. In my opinion, it is better to go to a university in a place that is far away from where you live" (*Underline added*) (Edmunds, McKinnon, & Zeter, 2009, p. 441). Like the example given in *Sourcework*, the contrastive statement here sets up an opinion contrary to that found at the beginning of the introduction.

In addition to the writing textbooks, contrastive statements were found in seven of the 23 (30%) assigned reading introductions. An example was found in one reading for the University Seminar, "Criminal Law, Women and Sexuality in the Middle East" (Zuhur, 2008). The introduction begins with an explanation of the belief that reform of family law in the Middle East will lead to reform of women's legal status in the region. This explanation is followed by a contrastive statement suggesting that this belief is incorrect: "Many of the proposals for legal transformation of women's status in the Middle East have concerned family law, commonly referred to in the region as personal status law. Indeed, many further reforms in this area are necessary. However, reforms in family law by themselves will not suffice to achieve legal and actual transformation of

women's status" (*Underline added*) (p. 17). A thesis statement then follows the contrastive statement. Through the contrastive statement, the author introduces a contrary opinion, like those found in *Sourcework* and *Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT*.

A more extended example of a contrastive statement was found in another assigned reading from the University Seminar, "Cultural Cognition and Public Policy" (Kahan & Braman, 2005). The article attempts to explain the "epistemic origins of political conflict" (p. 147), and develops a gap in the literature through an extended multi-paragraph introduction. A contrast is set up in the second paragraph, which begins, "At first glance, it might seem that such disagreement doesn't really require much explanation" (p. 147). The authors then follow up with a contrastive statement at the beginning of the third paragraph: "But it turns out that this explanation is as simplistic as it is intuitive" (*Underline added*) (p. 147). The word "but" is used here to introduce the statement, in which the authors' own opinions are presented in opposition to common wisdom.

Even though the contrastive statement was not attended to directly in textbooks and written feedback, this feature is pervasive in the student participants' writing. It thus seems to be a hidden feature which is present and exerting rhetorical effects (Rickert, 2013), even though it is not directly addressed in sources. Thus, this feature began to appear in the second or third writing samples for both the student-participants. Nao used it in 8 out of 16 (50%) of the introductions in her collected essays, while Harumi used it in 22 out of 31 (71%) of her introductions. Because this feature was not directly referred to in the textbooks or written feedback, its pervasiveness suggests the strong influence on the students' writings of the textbook examples and the assigned readings. This offers a

paradigm case of feature variations in introductions not taught directly by instructors or textbooks which nevertheless powerfully inform the development of the students' writings.

CHAPTER 5: STUDENT PERCEPTION AND NEGOTIATION OF DISCONTINUITIES IN LEARNING TO WRITE INTRODUCTIONS

The previous chapter demonstrated that students were exposed to a variety of different ways of knowing introductions, from direct instruction and feedback from textbooks and instructors, to implicit understanding gained from introductions in readings they encountered. This chapter focuses on how two learners, Nao and Harumi, negotiated the different and sometimes conflicting ways of knowing and writing the features of introductions. The sources of writing knowledge the participants encountered highlighted different features, and prescribed certain ways of writing these features while proscribing others. The participants negotiated these variations by weighing options and making choices, accepting some ways of writing introductions and resisting others.

1. Nao: Aligning with Authority

Nao's explanation of the choices that she made in writing an introduction for a group research paper illuminates the various influences from not only sources immediately connected to the research paper assignment, but also sources encountered in her personal history. The sources mentioned by Nao include written feedback from one of her instructors, Mika, and the opinions of her peers in her 1st Year Writing class. In her first semester at the university, Nao was asked to write an essay on the

positive and negative aspects of globalization. In her introduction to the essay, she gave historical background on the emergence of a globalized world. In written feedback from Mika, she was advised to “define globalization at the beginning” (Nao Globalization Essay, 2nd draft, 6/30/2011). Nao adopted this as a feature of introductions--a definition of the topic--and attempted to include it in the group research paper she co-wrote in the second semester of the course.²⁸ This created some conflict with her co-writers. The topic of the research paper was fair trade, and she explained the conflict as follows:

Our first question is now what is fair trade, but before one was how does fair trade affect the world, so I thought in order to make part 1, we have to write also fair trade definition. But some of my friends were saying we can just write about effect of fair trade. (Nao 12-13-2011 interview)

A negotiation began here that included not just Nao and her peers, but also a previously encountered source--written feedback from Mika on a previous essay. Nao wanted to first confirm with the instructor whether not including a definition in the introduction would be acceptable, as she explained:

They also argued that for definition of fair trade we can write later. And so I suggested we can write about definition of fair trade later but hand in our papers to professor Mika before that. We should ask her and confirm about that. (Nao 12-13-2011 interview)

Nao also received some information about using definitions from a member of another group, who spoke to Mika, as Nao explained:

Nao: I talked with other group’s member, but she said she was said “you should not write too much about definition”, of their topic.

Interviewer: She was told this.

Nao: Yes.

²⁸ In this later essay the students decided the topic and gathered readings themselves. While the earlier essay was based on an assigned prompt and assigned readings, Nao does not make a distinction between these two kinds of essays.

Interviewer: By professor Mika.

Nao: Yes. But, since due date is coming, I thought we can't change more.

Interviewer: Can't.

Interviewer: Can't.

Interviewer: Okay. So in the end, did you keep the definition?

Nao: Yes.

This would seem to suggest that Nao's co-writers may have been more in alignment with the instructor in not including the definition in the introduction. However, when the group submitted the draft with the definition to the professor and did not receive any comments about either moving the definition or omitting it from the introduction, the group decided to keep this feature. Mika's only comment on the feature was to give advice about where to find the definition. Nao explained:

Interviewer: And then, did you get feedback on that from the professor? Did she say anything?

Nao: About the grade?

Interviewer: No about the definition. Did she notice it?

Nao: Like, we were suggested to go to United Nations home page.

Interviewer: For the definition.

Nao: For the definition, yes. Fair trade.

Interviewer: Okay, so she thought the definition is okay?

Nao: She didn't say much about the definition for my group.

Interviewer: Okay, so do you think it's okay?

Nao: Maybe. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Are you going to change it?

Nao: I don't think we will. (Nao 12-13-2011 interview)

Nao went on to explain her commitment to the definition feature:

Interviewer: So if the other side says, "Oh wait we need to take out the definition."

Nao: Eh? (Laughs)

Interviewer: It's okay?

Nao: No it's not. (Laughs)

Interviewer: No. (Laughs)

Nao: No. (Nao 12-13-2011 interview)

Nao's negotiations in the production of this particular introduction are partially external and visible in her verbal interactions with peers. Her internal negotiations with sources are less clear, but appear to be based on aligning to Mika's authority. As we have seen, the suggestion to define the topic of the essay in the introduction was given by Mika earlier in a comment on a different essay, and adopted by Nao as a general feature of introductions. Nao was presented with an alternative option for introductions by her peers, but she aligned with Mika's version. Mika's version had a great deal of influence on Nao, not only because she would evaluate Nao, but also because of the number of alliances (Latour & Woolgar, 1986) Mika has to institutions with authority. Mika's alliances include the university itself and the doctoral degree in Education that she received from a major American university, which Nao was aware of. These sources of authority are also bound in alliances themselves with distinguished professors, research institutes, and publications, all of which contribute to her weight of authority. Mika, as a

native Japanese speaker who became fluent in English, presented herself as a model to her class of what they could achieve. As such, they were made aware of her doctoral degree from the major American university. The weight of Mika's authority is one possible explanation for Nao aligning with her version of introductions.

When variations are encountered in the process of learning how to write introductions, the learner needs to make choices, and may align with the variation prescribed by one source over others. The variation aligned with is generally seen as a more "correct" interpretation, based on the weight of authority of the source of the interpretation. Mika's weight of authority appears to have an influence on the choices Nao makes in her negotiation of variations encountered in early written feedback from Mika and the opinions of Nao's peers.

2. Harumi: Emerging Audience Awareness and Cooper's Dispositional Influence

2.1 Harumi's Emerging Audience Awareness

With Nao, we saw that while she encountered sources which prescribed the writing of introductions in different ways, in the end she chose the variation associated with the source with more authority, the written feedback from Mika. Harumi also encountered sources which prescribed different variations of introductions, and she also had to negotiate these variations, weighing and evaluating options, and making choices. In Harumi's case, however, she does not appear to commit to any given source, or choose one interpretation over others. Instead, we see her associating particular versions of introductions with particular audiences and rhetorical contexts, and also making choices based on her own preferences.

Harumi encountered two introduction variations that differed on the basis of the presence or absence of thesis statements. While Alice consistently required thesis statements as a necessary feature of introductions, Mika had only prescribed this feature in the first semester of her 1st Year Writing course. In the second semester, she advised against using a thesis statement in the introduction to indicate the main ideas of the essay. Harumi explained, “Professor Alice told us we need a kind of a plan or conclusion of the essay at the end of the first paragraph. But Professor Mika told us if we wrote those kinds of things in the first paragraph, at the introduction, it makes the essay less enjoyable so Professor Mika told us we shouldn’t put those kinds of things into the first paragraph introduction” (Harumi 4-19-2012 interview).

These two alternative versions of the academic introduction created a contradiction that Harumi needed to resolve. Instead of aligning with one source as the “right” way to write introductions, she adopted a more sophisticated, relative stance, writing the version of introductions that would be acceptable to a given audience. Noting the difference between Mika and Alice’s versions, she applied Alice’s version to what she viewed as the appropriate audience: Alice’s class, Integrated Skills, was paired with the University Seminar, so when writing the take-home essays for the University Seminar, Harumi chose to implement Alice’s version, as she explained below:

Harumi: Some professors said we need to write the directions for our own essays, like, what kind of thing we are going to write in the essay. And yeah, some professors says we need to write those things at the end of the first paragraph, the introduction.

Interviewer: Who says that?

Harumi: Uh, Professor Alice or, at the last semester Professor Mika also says but yeah. This semester, Professor Mika maybe asked to write more

higher level essay, and she says we don't need to write those kinds of things because it makes our essays like, less enjoyable.

Interviewer: Okay so she changed.

Harumi: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Which style did you start using?

Harumi: Depends on the classes. And the professors. So, for the take-home essay, I will use the Miss Alice's one. (Harumi 1-17-2012 interview)

In addition to associating form with particular audiences, Harumi also made connections between the content and audience, speculating that introductions that indicate the main ideas of the essay would be better for audiences who are unfamiliar with the topic of the essay. When asked about her choice to write an introduction that includes a thesis statement for an essay on migration, Harumi explained, "We can understand the contents because we learned about the immigrants now, but if someone who does not take this course read this essay, maybe they can't understand what we are talking about. So for just people who are not familiar with the topic, I think writing the summary in the introduction part will make my essay more easy to understand" (Harumi 12-20-2011 interview).

In these two excerpts, Harumi showed an awareness of associations between certain features and audiences, demonstrating an understanding of the variability of introductions, and how some features are better applied in particular contexts of reception. While Nao appeared to refine an understanding of a single universal introduction that can be applied to all writing situations, Harumi had a more relative point of view,

understanding that the academic introduction does not have a single universal form to be learned but that it can and does vary depending on the audience.

2.2 Harumi and Dispositional Influence

While audience awareness suggests a more sophisticated approach to writing, a sole reliance on the context of reception would lead to context, through sources and audiences, unilaterally determining the written product. In Harumi's negotiation with sources, however, we can also see how her personal history and preferences influenced the choices she made. The sources presented and emphasized certain variations, but in the process of negotiation, Harumi's emotional disposition also played a role. An example of this can be seen in her concern over whether her writing was pleasing to the audience. Harumi came to equate enjoyable writing with a less direct writing style. Her dispositional preference (Cooper, 2011) for enjoyable writing led her to make choices that contradicted advice she was given later to make her writing more direct.

Harumi related an earlier experience in her writing education in which she was encouraged to write indirectly. "Indirect" in this sense refers to giving the main point later in the text rather than at the beginning, what Hinds (1992) refers to as a semi-inductive style of organization. Describing her experience learning to write short essays in Japanese in high school, she explained that a "not directly way" was preferred by her instructors:

Um yeah, they evaluated my essay, and I got the comments like that. Like they did not say the way of writing directly is not good. But I got a high score when I wrote not directly way. How can I say? Um, so yeah I thought the Japanese teachers do not want us to write directly. Like it's

about high school. But some of the Japanese teachers may think saying directly is like childish. A little bit. (Harumi 12-26-2011 interview)

In this early experience, Harumi encountered an association of direct writing with “childish” writing. This preference of Harumi’s high school Japanese instructors is notable in that she still remembered and attended to it several years later.

Harumi was also given advice that associated direct writing with poor writing after she entered the university. In the University Seminar, she wrote an essay in which she gave the main idea of the essay not only in the introduction, but also repeated it throughout the essay. This could be viewed as a direct way of writing, as the main idea is clear throughout, rather than delayed until the end. Harumi received the following comment from Will, one of the University Seminar professors, on her essay: “16/20 Sound, well-argued essay. Similarities and differences between the two groups are clearly expressed. Well constructed but rather too long - you repeat yourself quite often and this makes the essay less enjoyable to read. Avoid repetition!” (Harumi Take-home Essay #1, second semester, 10/11/2011). In an interview, Harumi explained that this comment had a significant emotional impact:

Harumi: And I already talked about it but I received the take-home exam from Professor Will. And he said my essay is unenjoyable, because I repeat the main idea again and again in my essay.

Interviewer: Hmm. He used the word “unenjoyable”?

Harumi: Yeah. (laughs) I was really shocked. (Harumi 12-26-2011 interview)

In another interview several months later she mentions the comment again:

Harumi: Yes. But just after I learned that thesis statement is really important, I used thesis statement so many times in one essay. Like I talked about the same thing many times in essay. Then the Professor Will told me this makes my essay less enjoyable.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, I remember that. Less enjoyable.

Harumi: Yes. (Laughs) So after I got this advice from professor, I'm kind of thinking about this one all the time. (Harumi 5-21-2012 interview)

Harumi had been taught that a direct form of writing in which the thesis is made clear throughout the essay would be appropriate in English. While some instructors might accept this way of writing, Will, perhaps due to his previous career as a journalist, expressed a dislike for it. Will's comment about writing that is less enjoyable had similarities to the instruction from her Japanese teachers to avoid direct writing, which was described as "childish." Her repetition of the main idea of the essay could also be viewed as direct writing. Both sources expressed dissatisfaction with direct forms of writing, through their comments that it is "less enjoyable" or "childish."

It appears that the idea of "less enjoyable" resonated with Harumi on a deep level, to the extent that a brief comment left a strong impression. Harumi also frequently used the phrase "less enjoyable" in reference to the kinds of writing Mika did not want her to write, as was seen in the previously mentioned interview excerpt: "Professor Mika told us if we write those kinds of things in the first paragraph, at the introduction, it makes the essay less enjoyable" (Harumi 4-19-2012 interview). It would seem that this phrase touched her on an affective level, and became part of her dispositional preferences (Cooper, 2011). Harumi's strong affective response to Will's feedback is part of a personal history, and is part of the disposition she brings to the rhetorical situation. Will's

feedback triggered an emotional response as we saw in her comments about feeling "shocked," and how she was "thinking about this one all the time," and the experience merged with her personal history and dispositional preferences. Some part of Harumi's emotional makeup, perhaps a desire to please or a need for approval, was triggered and then played a part in her weighing of options and making choices regarding features of introductions.

The role of Harumi's disposition in the negotiation of introduction variations can be seen in the following interview excerpt. Harumi's dispositional preferences would put her into a minor conflict with Alice over the need to state the main idea of the essay more directly. Thus, in an essay she wrote for Alice, Harumi did not strictly follow Alice's prescription for introductions, and we see her own preferences having an effect on the writing choices she makes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Alice expected students to write introductions that directly stated the main ideas of the essay. In an essay Harumi wrote on the topic of whether the world is becoming more culturally homogenized, Harumi gave the following thesis at the end of the introduction: "Therefore, the world would not be converge without diverge and hybridize and I disagree with the idea that the world will converge completely in the future" (Harumi Integrated Studies essay #1, second semester, 10/22/2011). In the margin next to the thesis statement, Alice wrote, "Try to be specific when stating your opinion. :)" When discussing this feedback, Harumi expressed a concern that a more specific thesis statement, perhaps listing the main points of the essay, would be less enjoyable:

Interviewer: Do you think you could make it more specific?

Harumi: But if [I] do that, this essay might be less enjoyable. (Harumi 1-17-2012 interview)

Harumi understood that the thesis could be more specific, but was reluctant to write that kind of thesis because of her dispositional preferences. Even though she had developed an understanding of the instructor's expectations, these expectations did not only in themselves determine how she wrote the introduction. Her own dispositional preference for avoiding unenjoyable writing came into play, and led her to make a choice in writing the introduction that did not align well with the instructor's expectations. Harumi's writing of introductions was based on an awareness of the prescriptions of sources and the expectations of audiences; however, her writing did not simply follow these prescriptions and expectations, which would be a pure reflection of the contexts of writing and reception. She also plays a personal role in shaping the outcome, through her dispositional preferences.

As Harumi became a more experienced writer, her own preferences appeared to play a stronger role as she adopted a position she described as "flexible." This flexible attitude incorporated an awareness of source variations and audience expectations with her own dispositional preferences. In a follow-up interview conducted late in her second year at the university, Harumi describes her flexibility in relation to features of the body paragraphs of an essay. In the Integrated Studies class, Alice prescribed what she referred to as a "sandwich style" of paragraphing, in which the topic sentence of a body paragraph is restated in the final sentence of the paragraph. Harumi understood this variation but chose not to write that way, based on her own preferences, as she explained in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: How about the second year of writing? How has it been different from first year?

Harumi: I actually didn't follow the styles so much. More flexible. (laughs) When I was a freshman, I thought I have to do this and this, when I was writing the essay. But this year, especially for the fall semester, I actually didn't care style a lot. So I'm not sure it's okay or not (laughs) but....

Interviewer: I see, interesting. So more flexible, can you be more specific about how you're more flexible?

Harumi: Last year I always used the sandwich style, but for this year, I think I should not repeat the same thing again, because it's kind of, how can I say, boring? It's too much. I didn't use the sandwich style. So often I did but, sometimes I didn't repeat the topic sentence. (Harumi 1-10-2013 interview)

In her comment that the sandwich style is “boring,” we see that as Harumi became more experienced, her personal preferences took a stronger role. She was aware of the feature presented by Alice, but unlike Nao, she did not attempt to align with the instructor’s authority. Instead, she weighed options and included her dispositional preferences as part of the negotiation that occurs in her writing.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I will discuss the data findings in relation to the foundations for learning written discourse conventions presented in Chapter 2. First, I will present a summary and analysis of the findings of the data collected on variations in introductions in Chapter 4. Then, I will discuss the findings from the interview data from Chapter 5 in relation to interaction, joint attention, and negotiation. Finally, I will discuss the pedagogical implications of my findings.

1. Variation in Introductions

In Chapter 4, we saw that different sources had different ways of describing introductions and also enacting them through examples, drawing attention to some features while excluding others. This demonstrates that, at least at this research site, knowledge of writing conventions was varied rather than uniform. The differences found were the following:

1. **Inclusion of thesis statement in introductions.** The two textbooks, *Sourcework* and *Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT*, prescribed thesis statements for introductions in two kinds of essays, the research paper and the independent writing task essay, but did not prescribe them for the response essay or the integrated writing task essay. Although one instructor, Alice, made specific

mention of including a thesis statement in introductions, another instructor, Mika, advised against thesis statements in introductions in the second semester of her course. Additionally, thesis statements were found in 65% of the assigned reading introductions, demonstrating a majority but not uniformity.

2. **Specificity of thesis statements.** Both *Sourcework* and *Developing Skills for the TOEFL iBT* prescribed specificity in thesis statements, with *Sourcework* prescribing a greater degree of specificity. One University Seminar instructor, Saki, and two Integrated Studies instructors, Alice and Steve, also advised specificity in their written feedback. However, another University Seminar instructor, Richard, did not require specificity, and even described Harumi's introduction containing a non-specific thesis as a model introduction.
3. **Acceptability of "there exist (number) reasons" thesis.** While one 1st Year Writing instructor, Mika, explicitly advocated this thesis form, an Integrated Studies instructor, Steve, advised against it in written feedback.
4. **Acceptability of "will do" statements.** Although a "will do" statement in place of a thesis statement was implicitly accepted by Alice, both Kotaro and I advised against it in the TOEFL and Presentation Skills and Integrated Studies courses, respectively. However, even though two instructors advised against it, it was found in a small percentage (13%) of the assigned readings.
5. **Use of hooks in introductions.** Hooks were prescribed by one textbook, *Sourcework*, and found in almost none of the assigned readings.
6. **Use of contrastive statements.** No explicit mention was made of contrastive statements by any of the sources. However, it was found in example introductions

in both textbooks, and in 30% of the assigned readings. Even though it was not addressed through explicit instruction, it appeared in 50% of Nao's introductions, and 71% of Harumi's introductions.

Thus, a significant number of variations were found around one single set of writing conventions, those concerning introductions. This is not to say that there was not also agreement regarding certain aspects of introductions--what we might call core features or rhetorical functions that identify an introduction as an introduction and not something else--such as the rhetorical function of giving some kind of orientation to the rest of the work. Other features that were not unanimously agreed upon still had a significant amount of agreement across sources, such as the requirement of a thesis statement. Nevertheless, variations and differences across sources were still present to a significant degree.

2. Learning Introductions through Interaction and Joint Attention

By *interaction* I refer to a process of learning that is more than a passive absorption of a unified and universally agreed-upon set of knowledge. Using grammar as an example, we saw in Chapter 2 that alternative approaches to second language acquisition show that grammar is dynamically emergent, and the learning of language is a dynamic process of engagement with other individuals and things in the world. In the same way, learning written discourse conventions does not involve a linear transfer of unified rules, but attending with others to a convention, and cognitively aligning to a particular way of knowing that convention.

2.1 Joint Attention through Triadic Interaction

In Nao and Harumi's experiences, we saw that learning was not based on a dyadic and linear transmission from instructor to student, wherein one "correct" way of writing introductions was acquired by the student. Instead, both student-participants encountered many sources directing attention to introductions in different ways, and knowledge of introductions changed along with changes in members of triadic interactions.

For example, Nao encountered differences regarding the presence of definitions in introductions in her struggle over including a definition of "fair trade" in her group research paper. Definitions as potential features of introductions were discussed in *Sourcework*, in which "Define a word that is central to your topic" (Dollahite & Haun, 2012, p. 102), was included as one kind of hook. However, Nao did not make reference to the textbook in her interviews, so it is unclear whether it was an influence. One of her instructors, Mika, and her peer collaborators on a group research paper were the notable influences on this aspect of introductions, according to her interview data. While Mika directed Nao's attention one way, Nao's peers directed it another way, demonstrating that learning to write introductions in this case was not a matter of linear acquisition, but of weighing and choosing from different perspectives.

One difference Harumi encountered involved whether to consider the thesis statement as an integral aspect of introductions. In this case as well, although the environment presented a wide variety of views on this topic in the textbooks and assigned readings, these were not accounted for in Harumi's interviews. According to Harumi, she encountered two different views of thesis statements as parts of introductions through

Mika and Alice, with Mika advocating against thesis statements in one case, and Alice advocating in favor of their presence. As a result, she had to negotiate this discontinuity.

These differences in the composition of introductions reflect the contingency of knowledge in relation to different sources (Latour, 1999), as well as the non-monolithic nature of culture and community as repositories of knowledge. For the student-participants in this study, an objective understanding of introductions was not found "out there" in the environment. Instead, knowledge was the result of interaction with specific objects of attention through triadic interaction, such that the members of the interaction determined, or at least strongly influenced, how the object was known.

2.2 Implicit Learning of Features of Introductions

The student-participants learned how to write introductions not only by having their attention consciously directed to features, but also by unconsciously encountering them in textbooks and assigned readings, which they then reproduced in their own essays. For instance, although contrastive statements were not directly referred to by instructors or textbooks, they were found in textbook examples as well as assigned readings for the University Seminar, and were reproduced in a significant number of the student-participants' essays. This provides an example of things in the world influencing the individual in an unconscious way (Rickert, 2013), affecting the choices the student-participants made in their writing.

2.3 Trajectories of Experience in Learning Introductions

The student-participants engaged in triadic interactions over time as learners, foregrounding the historical trajectory of writers engaging with writing conventions (Chin, 1994; Prior, 2003), and highlighting how past encounters shape subsequent learning situations. This was seen in the case already mentioned above, where the written product that was Nao's group research paper was not only the product of her negotiation with her peers, but also included her previous experience with Mika's written feedback, in which attention was directed to definitions as a feature of introductions. The previous encounter resulted in a particular understanding of introductions, which then conflicted with how her peers understood them. Nao's negotiation with her peers was one of a series of negotiations that make up her trajectory of experience, through which she reconciles the discontinuities that arise.

Harumi's experience with learning introductions demonstrated how her emotional preferences played a role in the choices she made, with previous encounters shaping her disposition and preferences (Cooper, 2011). The environment, through a trajectory of experience, not only reshapes how an object is understood cognitively, but also leaves an affective impression. As emotional beings, writers not only make choices and negotiate their emerging understanding based on logical reasoning, but also based on emotional preferences shaped through personal histories. Successive encounters with different sources over time shaped Harumi's dispositional preferences, which ended in mild resistance against Alice's version of thesis statements and direct writing. She first encountered a view of direct writing as "childish" from her Japanese high school instructor, as we see in Figure 1. She then encounters a view of direct writing as "less

enjoyable" from Will, whose comments leave a strong impression on her. This is then reinforced through instruction from Mika, who also refers to direct writing as "not enjoyable." Based on these experiences, she developed preferences that appeared to affect her reception of advice from Alice to be more direct, leading her to resist that advice. In our interviews, Harumi had demonstrated an awareness of different sources prescribing different variations, and she described how she had made writing choices based on audience expectations. In her disagreement with Alice, however, we see that her own affective leanings intervened in the choice she made.

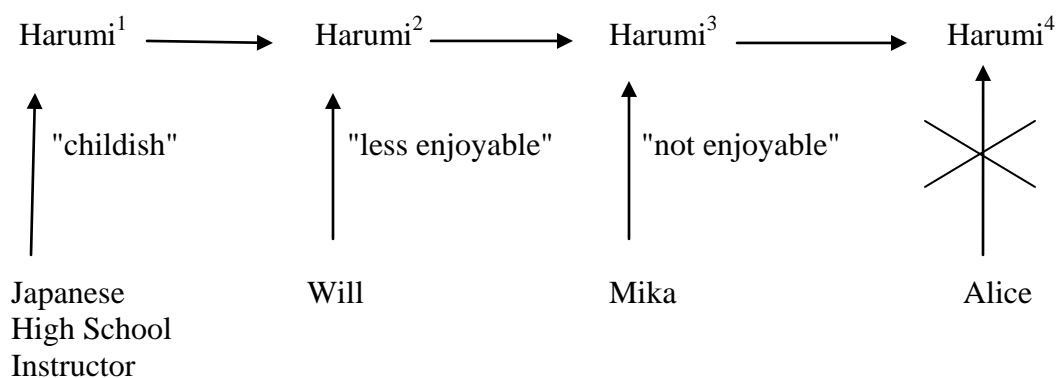


Figure 1. The shaping of Harumi's dispositional preferences by sources over time.

Each student-participant encountered different discontinuities through different configurations of sources. In each interaction, the student-participants' personal histories of understanding and dispositions come into play. The above examples show that the learning of written discourse conventions is not a simple transfer of information from mentor to newcomer. Communities and cultures vary in the degree of cohesion and agreement over their practices, but even in cases where a strong degree of cohesion exists,

a writer's individual history and disposition plays a role in choices made regarding which features to attend to, enact, or ignore.

2.4 Alignment and Weight of Authority in Learning Introductions

The student-participants encountered many variations in introductions, but not all variations were evaluated equally. When explaining the discontinuity Nao encountered regarding definitions as a part of introductions, she focused on her instructor and peers.²⁹ For Nao, the opinion of her instructor, based on previous written feedback, took precedence over the opinions of her peers. One possible explanation for this is the weight of authority of Mika, the source promoting that variation. Mika's authority was based on several associations (Latour, 1999; Latour & Woolgar, 1986). First, as the course instructor, she was associated with the university, which has its own weight of authority. This association gives her interpretations more weight. If she had been a student tutor, for example, she would not have had the same association with the university, and her interpretation would have been more questionable. Furthermore, she had authority based on her personal history, which she had explained to Nao and the other students.³⁰ This personal history supported her interpretation through a chain of alliances (Latour, 2005), as we see in Figure 2. Associations such as famous professors and publications give prestige to the university Mika attended, which gives authority by association to her Ph.D. degree. This, along with her position at the current university, gives her weight of authority through associations.

²⁹ As mentioned in Section 2.1, although *Sourcework* also referred to definitions as a possible feature of introductions, Nao did not refer to it in her interviews.

³⁰ See Chapter 5, Section 1.

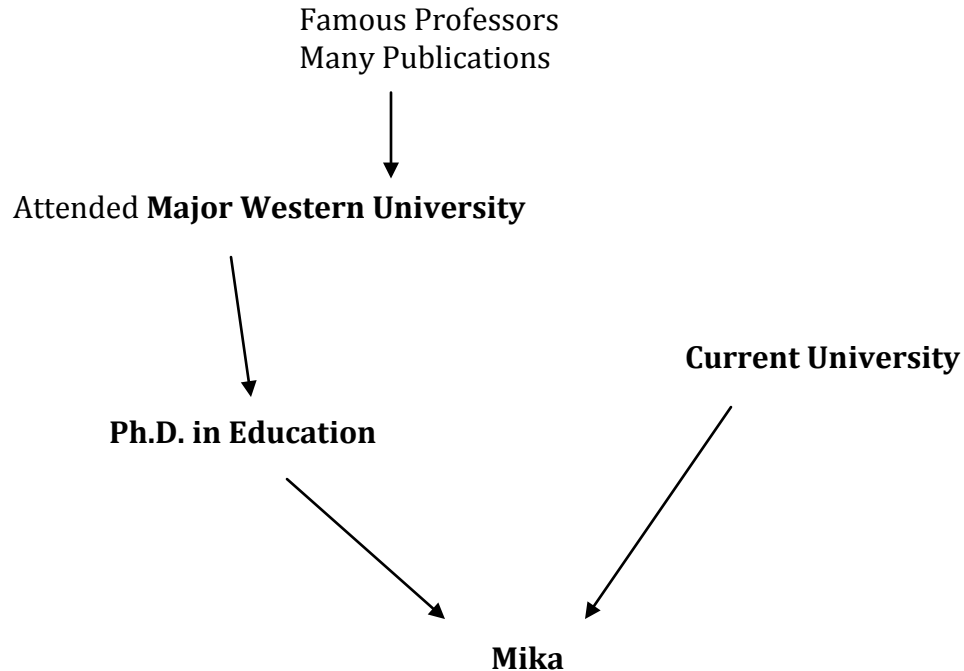


Figure 2. Mika's alliances with other sources gives her authority more weight.

These alliances gave more weight to Mika's interpretation of introductions. The significance of this is that it accounts for continuity of particular interpretations, and the emergence of structure, or temporary stability and contingency, instead of a chaos of relative interpretations. Purely emphasizing the variability of understandings that can occur through triadic interaction can lead to the false impression that there is no continuity within communities. Yet continuity is clearly present, as there are many shared norms and conventions that are passed down to newcomers. Knowledge is contingent but not discontinuous. Lines of shared understanding exist across individuals and texts, based on alignment to sources with more associations.

3. Negotiation in Learning Introductions

Nao and Harumi's processes of learning how to write introductions did not demonstrate a direct transmission of knowledge, but instead represented negotiation and reflexivity in learning.

In the sources mentioned by the student-participants, certain features of introductions were highlighted while others were occluded, such as the presence of thesis statements, hooks, and contrastive statements. There were also variations in descriptions of how to produce the features that were mentioned, such as the differences in specificity of thesis statements. Because the student-participants were faced with many ways of knowing introductions and their features, they had to negotiate these differences through weighing options and making choices. In this study, three examples of negotiation were found. First, in Nao's negotiation of a definition feature in introductions, she aligned with the teacher with more authority. Second, in Harumi's comments on how she dealt with differences in audience expectations, as mentioned above, she did not choose to align with one way of writing introductions, but adopted the way that was appropriate for a given audience as she understood it. Finally, in Harumi's comments about direct vs. indirect writing, her own disposition, based on a trajectory of experience that shaped her emotional impressions and preferences, played a role in the choices she made. The student-participants negotiated an understanding from competing versions encountered in past and present before adopting a particular way of knowing and doing a practice. The student-participants navigated discontinuities by adopting some features and rejecting others, aligning with a way of knowing and doing a practice that accords with some sources in a community but may differ from others.

The ecological approaches to writing and learning discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation noted that culture and community are reflexive rather than monolithic, with individuals changing the structure even as the structure guides them. The student-participants in this study were guided by preexisting conventions, but the participants were also part of the dynamic interplay between structure and members. Whether conventions endure and become structure is contingent upon individuals reproducing them, either consciously or unconsciously (Bakhtin, 1986). In case of unconscious reproduction, we saw that variations existed among sources, such that there were potential variations in what would be produced, such as the contrastive statement. In cases of conscious reproduction, options were weighed and choices made. Through aligning with sources prescribing particular variations, the student-participants took part in reinforcing those variations. But because the variations were multiple, and encountered through trajectories of experience, the learning outcomes were not strictly predictable. Harumi's case showed how her disposition affected her choices, giving her some agency over structure, though the agency was shaped through a trajectory of encounters with the world. To put it differently, both Harumi and Nao were collaborative with pre-existing structures, rather than determined by them, based on their variable nature and the choices made to reproduce some variations instead of others. In this way, Harumi and Nao contributed to a contingent structure, giving feedback to the structure as it guided them.

4. Pedagogical Implications

In the following two sections, I will consider the implications that an attention to variation has for writing pedagogy. First, I discuss how attention to variation empowers

the learner but still respects audience expectations. Then, I examine how attention to variation has the potential to increase student involvement in the classroom as well as student motivation.

4.1 Students as Architects

In order to gain a better understanding of written discourse conventions and what features are expected by particular audiences, awareness of genre forms and strategies for analyzing new genres encountered are necessary (Bawarshi, 2003; Devitt, Reiff, & Bawarshi, 2004; Johns, 1997). But at the same time, because written discourse conventions vary, instructors should also attend to these variations, and be receptive to them in student writing to some degree. The variations attended to would need to be grounded in an informed understanding of the varieties that are more common than others. Such an approach recognizes that not all variations are accepted equally, and due to the weight of authority and number of associations, certain interpretations of written discourse conventions and their features will be stronger than others. Choice and agency are balanced with an understanding of situational norms.

These variations and differences offer points of intervention and change. Instructors with genre knowledge can explain writing expectations and discuss samples of academic disciplinary writing with students (e.g., Hyland, 2004; Johns, 1997, Kress, 1999; Paltridge, 2002; Swales, 1990), while at the same time attending to the ways that certain features are present, absent, or vary across these samples (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2010). The instructor could also take note of the rhetorical effects the different varieties produce. For example, writing in scientific journals is typically presented in an author-

absent manner (Hyland, 2004), creating an impression of universal fact and truth rather than contextually and materially situated technical interpretation. However, there are also science writers such as Stephen Jay Gould who write in such a way that we have a strong feel for the author's presence, of the author relating their version of the story. Examining these differences in inclusion and form of written discourse conventions offers students an understanding of how some conventions are more expected than others, but variations allow some degree of choice. Focusing on variation presents writing not as a technical set of instructions to be mastered, but as a set of expectations that allow for a degree of creativity and original expression within certain boundaries. Unlike an expressivist approach that allows the writer a great deal of artistic license, an awareness of variation draws attention to the expectations that exist, while also pointing out that there is room for flexibility. We can use an architecture metaphor for this perspective on the author's relationship to writing. The architect has a vision of how she would like to design her building, but needs to attend to the aesthetic norms and expectations of the client and community, as well as material, institutional, monetary, and legal constraints. The architect is aware of not only variations but also constraints on variations, and learns to filter a creative vision through the possibilities and constraints of the audience and environment.

When students look at a range of specific samples of writing, rather than exclusively learning formal rules, they can find variation in the kinds of evidence and appeals used, the location of thesis statements, the lengths of paragraphs, the presence of the author, and the presence of counterarguments. They also learn which aspects are more flexible and which are more strongly required. They learn to distinguish points of

flexibility and rigidity in order to express themselves in creative ways that nevertheless work within common audience expectations.

Instructors still need to be prescriptive in teaching some basic foundations of English writing. Writing has some norms that are more powerful than others. It is an instructor's responsibility to inform students of stronger norms, but he or she can also point out variations. Instead of going into the classroom with the expectation that students memorize and reproduce prescribed forms, the instructor could take a more exploratory approach, encouraging students to question and experiment. If the instructor chooses to begin with a five-paragraph essay style for novice writers, he or she should do so emphasizing that it is a learning tool, just like an artist learns to reproduce certain basic techniques before developing their own unique styles. There are certain standards that can serve as foundational guidelines, essential to the academic essay format. These could include the need for an overarching theme that holds ideas together, evidence for arguments, and beginnings and endings. These could be used as basic guidelines, while allowing some flexibility in other areas, such as the form of the introduction, the location of the thesis statement, or the kinds of evidence used. The instructor should also point out when the student has diverged too far from stronger community expectations. Stronger norms and expectations are respected, but also seen as situated, and existing forms are explored for points of flexibility.

4.2 Content-Emergent Classrooms and Student Engagement

A pedagogy that attends to variation in writing practices also has the potential to increase student engagement, when the students' opinions become part of the classroom

content. Classrooms are often taught through either a banking model or a Socratic method of teaching. In the banking model (Freire, 1970/1993), the instructor imparts knowledge and the student faithfully reproduces it. In the Socratic method, the instructor uses a question and answer strategy to engage the students more actively than in a straightforward lecture, but the instructor still has the “correct” answer in mind, and the student’s task is to discover this predetermined answer. The students intuitively pick up on and adapt to these passive models of interaction, in which the game is to figure out and reproduce what the instructor is thinking in order to get a good grade.

If the classroom is instead approached with a more open agenda, in which the students and instructor learn from each other, the students’ opinions are validated and they become more inclined to participate. Such a classroom does not give students excessive control over the agenda and content of the class, for such a classroom would undervalue the instructor’s knowledge, experience, and leadership in guiding students through important areas of content. Instead, the instructor brings the students’ perspectives into the classroom, so that the content is partly directed yet partly emergent. The instructor enters the classroom expecting to learn new things, or to have her attention directed in new ways. Rather than only displaying the knowledge they receive, students interact with the content in a more meaningful way.

In the writing classroom, an emergent agenda in which the teacher also learns from the students can be approached through both form and content. The writing instructor explains the expectations of forms of writing in different academic disciplines, but at the same time explores samples of writing together with the students, attentive to what the students see in the samples, and encouraging them to develop their opinions in

depth and clarity. This requires flexibility and comfort with collaboration, and active intellectual engagement with what the students are saying in the class. When analyzing a piece of writing as a class, the instructor stays open to different opinions, which requires a position of listening, openness, and reserve (Kameen, 2000). The instructor looks at the piece of writing beforehand and develops her own ideas of what works and why, but stays open to what the students say about what works and what does not. This collaborative approach also emphasizes teacher-student conferencing when giving feedback on student papers. Written feedback on an essay can easily become commandments rather than suggestions, and there is little room for response and dialogue. In teacher-student conferences, however, the instructor could explore with the student why the student chose a particular way of writing, and at the same time point out common expectations of academic discourse. The instructor can also point out that different teachers have different expectations, showing how practices are viewed differently by different people.

An outcome of the content-emergent classroom is more motivation and engagement as students become co-explorers and have more control over expression, rather than conforming to and reproducing given norms. In Casanave's (2002) case study of a doctoral student in sociology, she explained how the student's frustration and dissatisfaction with the way sociological genres frame society quantitatively and dispassionately led to the student withdrawing from the program. This could be viewed as an example of the problems that arise when students feel that they must conform to genre expectations. If this student had been taught to look for points of variation and intervention, she might not have felt as if she were being forced to assimilate into a

worldview she did not share. She could begin to see that genres are not totalitarian, but instead have some degree of flexibility that allows for a degree of individual expression. Part of an approach that attends to variations is changing the way the student perceives herself in relation to genres. If genres are presented as static products of power relations and institutional values, the student is not positioned in a way that allows for intervention and change, leading to diffidence and concession to genre norms. When the agency of writers in perceiving and reproducing genres differently is emphasized, the student becomes positioned in a way that allows for intervention and change. This moves away from a strict master-novice relationship, into an instructional situation that is more collaborative, as the teacher offers information but is also open to student discovery of significant features. Students' ideas and opinions are validated, leading to greater engagement and motivation.

It would be difficult to take this approach to writing into some other areas of knowledge. When we learn how to repair a car or assemble a computer, we do not need to attend to avenues of intervention and change. But writing is different, because it is a form of expression. It is a way of communicating to and shaping the world. If we treat it as otherwise, we ignore the transformative and agentive potential in it. The way that we shape our ideas, either in speech or written texts, can have different persuasive effects on the world, as we can see when we read a good editorial or listen to a moving speech. Moreover, disciplinary genres of writing influence how we interact with the world, sometimes excluding particular kinds of evidence or different ways of expressing information. In addition to bringing some of the art back into writing, this approach opens

a way for social change and transformation, as well as orienting the students to be active in their expression rather than passive reproducers.

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VITA

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