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Chapter 2

Mastering Academic English: International Graduate Students' Use of Dialogue and Speech Genres to Meet the Writing Demands of Graduate School

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In the last few decades, American colleges and universities have seen an influx of international graduate students. These students believe that a graduate degree from an American university will open doors for them, either in the United States or at home, and are willing to spend considerable time, effort, and money to attain their academic goals. American educational institutions welcome such students both for their academic prowess and, it must be admitted, for the welcome income they bring, especially in times of budget constraints. The end result is that "American educational institutions are to the modern world what Alexandria in Egypt was to the ancient world" (Ubadigbo, 1997, p. 2).

When international students arrive in American universities, they face the challenge of simultaneously adapting to a new country, language, culture, and educational system. For graduate students, the challenge is particularly great as they are often expected to produce scholarly writing within a short period of their arrival. This can be especially daunting when

such students may have had little experience of writing in English (Dong, 1998; Rose & McClafferty, 2001) and may have expectations that are different from those of their professors (Belcher, 1994; Fishman & McCarthy, 2001; Fox, 1994). Despite the difficulties they face, many international graduate students are able to rise to the challenge of writing academic English. How they are able to do so is the focus of the study I report in this chapter, which used Bakhtin's concepts of *dialogism* and *speech genres* as a theoretical framework for understanding how international graduate students master the genre of academic writing.

My motivation for conducting this study was my realization that many of the more successful graduate students with whom I have worked as a writing tutor in a university learning center seemed to share a certain characteristic: They tended to seek out opportunities for interaction in order to improve their written work. To determine how these students learned through their interaction and to investigate the other factors that led to their success in academic writing, I designed a research study in which I used Bakthin's theories of *dialogism* and *speech genres*—two concepts that seemed particularly apposite for investigating how such students learned to master the genre of academic English—as a theoretical lens to bring these students' learning experiences into sharper focus.

In the first part of this chapter, I review the concepts of dialogism and speech genres and discuss how they are relevant to the problem of learning to write the genres of academic English. In the second part of this chapter, I introduce the study, discuss its findings and implications, and make suggestions for further research.

DIALOGISM

Dialogism is the term Bakhtin (1981, 1986) used to describe the interaction between a speaker's words, or utterances, and the relationship they enter into with the utterances of other speakers. The concept of dialogism was of fundamental importance to Bakhtin and has implications for the way we understand all spoken and written communication.

Inherent in Bakhtin's notion of dialogism is the idea of a speaker and a listener. In Bakhtin's (1986) view, the speaker is always responding to others' words:

> Any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree ... he presupposes not only the existence of the language system, but also the existence of preceding utterances, his own and others'—with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another .... Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances. (p. 69)

The trope of the utterance as a link in a chain of utterances was extensively used by Bakhtin. As I understand it, this chain has both temporal and spatial dimensions. In Western thought, the link of utterances stretches back in time to the words (and rhetorical models) of ancient Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews and forward in time to utterances that have yet to be spoken. The chain also stretches out to other fields, other genres, and other languages so that we can see, in Bakhtin's own work, for example, how the fields of linguistics, literary criticism, and philosophy enter into dialogue with each other and interanimate one another. Bakhtin's insights show us that dialogue ranges far and wide, through time and space.

Implicit in the idea of dialogue is the desire to elicit a response; we may even have a particular respondent in mind. Bakhtin (1986) called this concept *addressivity*, because the utterance is always directed at someone; it is not designed to dissipate in a vacuum. In everyday conversation, the addressee will (probably) be the person to whom we are speaking, but in writing, even though we may be removed in distance or time from our respondent, we still have a respondent in mind, from whom we wish to elicit a response. In Bakhtin's (1986) conception of dialogism, the listener, too, is always an active respondent: "When the listener perceives and understands the meaning of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it, augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution and so on" (p. 68). The listener may be the next link in the chain, or a future link. Even if an utterance does not evoke an immediate response on the part of a listener, the listener will respond eventually, either in words or in action.

In the genres of academic writing, especially in academic writing for publication in journals, dialogue is an essential part of the process a writer goes through to write an article. Often it is the author's reading of previous research that provides the impetus for conducting new research. Moreover, in writing an article, the author will almost certainly review the literature and, by doing so, will allow others to speak through his or her work and will add his or her voice to theirs, thereby adding another link to the chain.

Even the format of the typical research article has a kind of internal dialogism built into it. As Bakhtin (1986) himself pointed out, "In secondary speech genres, especially rhetorical ones .... Quite frequently within the boundaries of his own utterance the speaker (or writer) raises questions, answers them himself, raises objections to his own ideas, responds to his own objections and so on" (p. 72). Although the above-mentioned practices do not represent true dialogism—they are a rhetorical device rather than true dialogue—they do show how fundamental dialogue is to the practice of argumentation: To make an effective argument, it is important to anticipate and respond to the reader's response.

In a peer reviewed journal, dialogism is built right into the writing and publication process: The journal editor sends the article to various reviewers, who will write their comments on it, and the author is then required to respond to these comments if he or she wishes to have the article published. If the author is invited to revise and resubmit the article, this process may then start over again and, if the process stretches on long enough, the author will also need to rewrite the article to include the voices of other researchers who have been published since the process began.

Often, a journal will continue the dialogue after publication of an article by publishing others' responses to the original article. For example, in preparing to write this chapter, I researched how others had used Bakhtin's theories in their work and came across an article titled "*Individualism, Academic Writing, and ESL Writers,*" by Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999), published in the *Journal of Second Language Writing*. I also found Peter Elbow's (1999) response to this article, published in the same journal 6 months later and, published another 6 months later, Atkinson's (2000) response to Elbow's article. No doubt the dialogue will continue, and merely by referencing these articles I am adding another small link to the chain.

Amidst so much dialogue it is difficult to answer the question James Wertsch (1998) asked when analyzing Bakhtin's theories: Who is doing the talking? Wertsch (1998) pointed out that, from a Bakhtinian perspective, there will always be more than one voice. This presents both an opportunity and a challenge to a writer of English as a second language (ESL): by engaging in dialogic reading and writing she may come to understand (and hence to write) her subject better, but with so many voices echoing in her head she may find it difficult to make herself heard; she may even no longer be able to distinguish her own voice from those of others. This situation was described poignantly by Jieming, a Chinese graduate student in Helen Fox's writing class, in a note she handed in with her research paper:

> Note: ... It is hard for me to say from which resources I have drawn any ideas to put into this paper. However, one thing is clear; that all the knowledge and the ways I used to think and write are what I have learned from my teachers and others, although I have used my own mind to absorb and integrate them. I am very grateful to those who gave me knowledge and let me know how to recognize the world. And I am very sorry that I did not put any references at the end of this paper. (Fox, 1994, p. 64)

SPEECH GENRES

At first glance, the term *speech genre* seems singularly inapposite to use as a framework for analyzing the genre of academic *writing*. However, for Bakhtin, a speech genre is by no means limited to speaking alone; although

Bakhtin used words such as *speech*, *speaker*, *listener*, and *speech communication* throughout his work, he made it clear that his concepts apply equally to writing, writer, reader, and written communication (1986, p. 69).

Bakhtin saw language as a site of struggle wherein the collision of centripetal and centrifugal forces results in a condition of heteroglossia, in which context and the dialogic relationship between a speaker and other participants in speech communication are all important. On the one hand, centripetal forces play a normative role, ensuring that speakers of a language will be able to understand one another. On the other hand, centrifugal forces keep a language alive and allow for the creation of new genres.[1] Speech genres, then, are an outcome of the clash between centripetal and centrifugal forces, which causes language to fracture into new genres.

Although Bakhtin (1986) described speech genres as "relatively stable," he also noted their extreme heterogeneity. In discussing the links between style and genre, he pointed out that genre and style must be studied in their sociohistorical context: "Each sphere has and applies its own genres that correspond to its own specific conditions" (1986, p. 64). Moreover, "the specific conditions of speech communication specific for each sphere give rise to particular genres" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 64). It would be mistaken, then, to see genres as engraved in stone, and it would be equally mistaken to see academic writing as composed of one monolithic, unified genre. From a Bakhtinian perspective, there might be considerable variation in the written genres even of closely related fields. To understand why this is so, it is important to take into account their sociohistorical context.

Atkinson and Ramanathan's (1995) ethnography of two writing programs within the same university illustrates this point. The motivation for conducting the study was Atkinson's realization that the students he taught in the English Language Program (ELP) were perceived by the instructors in the University Composition Program (UCP) as having poor writing abilities. Moreover, certain characteristics that were emphasized in the first program (ELP) seemed to be criticized in the second (UCP).

After conducting a 10–month-long ethnographic study of the two programs, Atkinson and Ramanathan (1995) found some key differences between them. Several of these differences can be attributed to the differing writing genres favored by the two departments. For example, the instructors in the UCP felt that form should serve the writer's purpose (not vice versa) and favored subtle writing characterized by the use of imagery, metaphor, and personification. The ELP, in contrast, favored a clear, straight-

[1]Some examples of centripetal forces are dictionaries or freshman composition classes that teach traditional models of rhetoric; some examples of centrifugal forces are new technologies such as the Internet and popular art forms such as hip-hop.

forward, "workmanlike" prose and generally taught a deductive essay format. The most striking difference between the two programs, however, was that the ELP embraced the five-paragraph essay, a form that was despised by the UCP.

Atkinson and Ramanathan (1995), echoing Santos' (1992) earlier comments, suggested that the differences between the two programs stemmed from their different origins: All the faculty in the ELP had backgrounds in applied linguistics, whereas those in the UCP had backgrounds in composition and rhetoric. Both programs presumably intended to prepare their students for the writing they would have to do in college, but the two programs clearly favored different genres of academic writing. As a result, Atkinson and Ramanathan found that students moving from one context to the other may "experience a significant disjuncture" (p. 563). As Bakhtin (1986) suggested, an investigation of the sociohistorical background of the two departments is useful in explaining the difference.

My own experience in moving between departments leads me to suspect that such disjunctures are not uncommon. As a graduate student moving from the field of literature to the field of education, I had great trouble adapting to the genre and style of a typical research article in the social sciences; such articles initially seemed to me to be as dry and unpalatable as week-old French bread. Only later did I learn that their generic form reflected social scientists' desire to ally themselves with the hard sciences and to appreciate how the form facilitated clear presentation of research and aided comparison between articles.

Newly arrived graduate students may also experience a similar disjuncture—but to a much greater degree, especially if the written genres valued by their own cultures differ considerably from American academic genres. There have been many excellent discussions of the ways in which international students' cultures and expectations may clash with those of their American professors and of the ways in which this clash affects their writing (see, e.g., Fishman & McCarthy, 2001; Fox, 1994; Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). In the study reported in this chapter, I hope to show how international graduate students are able to win the struggle to appropriate the new genres to which they are exposed.

Because of their divergent historical development and differing aims, academic writing genres differ from one another considerably with respect to the amount of individuality they allow to writers within the genre. Bakhtin (1986) pointed out that

> Not all genres are equally conducive to reflecting the individuality of the speaker in the language of the utterance, that is, to an individual style. The most conducive genres are those of artistic literature: here the individual style enters directly into the very task of the utterance .... In the vast majority of speech genres, the individual style does not enter into the intent of the utterance, does not serve as its only goal, but is, as it were, an epiphenomenon of the utterance, one of its by products. (p. 63)

In researching this chapter, I found considerable differences among the ways that scholars use Bakhtin's concepts in their work, especially with regard to their focus on individuality in writing. Many researchers in the field of first-language composition focus on Bakhtin's notion of voice, which has been strongly linked to the notion of individuality and individual style (Baynam, 1999; Bialystosky, 1998; Farmer, 1995; Ritchie, 1998). This is in keeping with the genre of writing favored in most college composition classes, the instructors of which see individual voice as an important part of the genre.

By contrast, several ESL researchers reject the notion of voice, asserting that it is a Western construct unshared by members of non-Western cultures (Johns, 1999; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996). ESL researchers tend rather to focus instead on other Bakhtinian concepts, especially dialogue. This book is no exception. That researchers in English composition and researchers in ESL tend to draw on different concepts from Bakhtin indicates that they may value different characteristics in writing; thus, it is not surprising that the academic writing taught in ESL classes and in freshman composition classes may be different genres (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995).

One further point is of importance to the study reported in this chapter. Bakhtin pointed out that, because of the extreme heterogeneity of genres, no one can master every speech genre. In the following example, he illustrated how mastery is usually limited to a few genres:

> Frequently a person who has an excellent command of speech in some areas of cultural communication, who is able to read a scholarly paper or engage in a scholarly discussion, who speaks very well on social questions, is silent or very awkward in social conversation. Here it is not a matter of an impoverished vocabulary or of style, taken abstractly: this is entirely a matter of the inability to command a repertoire of genres of social conversation. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 80)

Only when we master genres can we use them freely and express our own individuality within them (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 80), yet mastery of genres is a struggle that may take years, and even then it is by no means assured, especially for non-native speakers.

Another point essential to mastery of the genre of academic writing is the ability to write authoritatively within the genre. Bakhtin (1981) discussed authority mostly in terms of *authoritative discourse*, which, for him, had par-

ticular qualities: It does not open itself to dialogue as do other forms of discourse (termed by Bakhtin as *internally persuasive discourse*); instead, it insists that one must either accept or reject it. One of the examples Bakhtin gave of authoritative discourse is "acknowledged scientific truth" (1981, p. 343). I suggest that the voice of scientific truth does have relevance to the genre of academic writing, especially for writing in the social sciences, which often carries with it the trappings of science in its use of terminology. For example, in social science writing (especially in studies that use a quantitative methodology), we often speak of theories, we pose research questions, and we prove or disprove hypotheses.

By using such expressions, we evoke the language of science to lend authority to our writing, and some research suggests we learn to do so at an early age. Wertsch (1991, 1998) has offered two examples of how children are able to gain control of the conversation by evoking the language of science. In one example, Wertsch (1991) analyzed a segment of classroom discourse (a fourth-grade science class) and found that one student's use of the scientific words—*lava* and *atmosphere*—had a profound effect on his classmates, who thought his response was "smart" although, in fact, the student's answer had very little to do with the question he was trying to answer. In another example, Wertsch (1998) analyzed a segment of dialogue in which a child was able to deflect her father's irritatingly authoritative questioning about how many sides a pyramid has by invoking the voice of an even higher authority, that of science. She did this by stating, "I'm used to Euler's formula" (p. 68).[2] Her invocation of these seemingly magical words gave her the authority to control the conversation, or at least to change its direction.

Our use of "scientific" language in our writing has a similar effect by allowing us, rightly or wrongly, to ally ourselves with the authoritative discourse of science. All writers wish to receive the accolade of being said to write with authority, but few of us are able to do so, especially those of us who are novice writers or who are writing English as a second language. In this study, I wished to determine what factors led international graduate students to become successful writers, and I expected that success in academic writing would be aided by at least being able to give the appearance of writing with authority.

In this review I have discussed some concepts that I believe are relevant to the problem of writing academic English in a second language: the dialogic nature of academic writing; the fact that genres reflect their sociohistoric development and thus vary, even between closely related fields; and the notion that, in order to write with authority, students might call on particular forms of discourse, for example, the authoritative discourse of science. In the next section, I will briefly review the challenges students face in writing English as a second language and introduce a study I conducted to investigate how students are able to meet these challenges.

[2]This is a method for calculating the number of faces of polyhedra.

THE PROBLEMS OF WRITING ACADEMIC ENGLISH IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

Writing English as a second language is a difficult, almost overwhelming, task for many international students. The difficulties such students face in writing in American colleges and universities have been well documented in second language writing research (Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Fox, 1994; Silva, 2001; Zamel & Spack, 1998). However, most studies of second language writing have focused on the writing of undergraduates in college composition classrooms (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Harklau, 2000; Warschauer, 1998) and in the content areas (Fishman & McCarthy, 2001; Leki, 2001; Leki & Carson, 1994, 1997). Comparatively few studies have focused on the challenges faced by international students writing at the graduate level (Prior, 1998, 2001, is an exception), and some of those that do tend to focus on the writing of theses and dissertations (Dong, 1996, 1998). However, international graduate students in many programs, especially those in the humanities and social sciences, are expected to do copious amounts of writing long before they reach the stage of writing a thesis or dissertation. For these students, the first years of graduate school are the most challenging, because there is often a huge gap between the level and amount of writing they have done so far and that which is now expected from them. In Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) terms, these students must appropriate and eventually master the genre of academic writing required by their field of study.

THE STUDY

To determine how international graduate students are able to bridge this gap—to raise the level of their writing to that required in graduate school—I conducted a qualitative interview study of five female graduate students whom I considered to be successful writers.[3] The participants in this study were five east and southeast Asian female graduate students, aged between 25 and 32. I selected Asian participants because, in the university where the research was conducted, most graduate students come from Asian countries. I chose female participants because I believed they would be more

[3]I defined these students as successful because they reported that, although writing English had initially been a struggle for them, they now received positive evaluation from their professors on their writing, as was evidenced by their high grade-point averages. Moreover, all the participants held research or teaching assistantships, and most had already published in their fields.

willing than men to discuss situations with a female researcher they might have found humiliating. One more point is important: my relationship with the participants. Prior to (and after) the study, I worked with three of the students (Anne, Becky, and Keiko—all pseudonyms) as a writing tutor in the university's learning center. This relationship is likely to have influenced the nature of their responses.

I collected data by means of open-ended interviews in which I asked the participants to tell me about their educational backgrounds, the kinds of writing they had to do in graduate school, and how they were able to meet the writing requirements of their programs. I analyzed the data using techniques based on grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and through constant comparison and recursive analysis I identified themes that I used to develop questions for a second round of interviews and a group discussion with all the participants. I collected follow-up data through e-mails and telephone conversations, often initiated by the participants themselves.

On the basis of my analysis, I identified the following themes in the data:

- Writing the genre of academic English is extremely challenging, but students were able to meet the challenge by creating opportunities for dialogue with (a) peers, (b) a writing tutor or an instructor, and (c) texts.
- Most of the graduate students believed that having an individual style or voice was not a key component in writing in their fields.
- The students believed that authority in writing came mostly from thorough knowledge of their fields, but they felt that having limited proficiency in English undermined their ability to write with authority.
- Although students were able to successfully appropriate the genres of their fields, mastery of this one genre did not lead to mastery of other genres.

THE DIFFICULTY OF WRITING ACADEMIC ENGLISH AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL

> Do you remember your first assignment in graduate school?
>
> I was almost crying. (Keiko)
>
> Even the word W-R-I-T-E just, you know, made me nervous. (Becky)
>
> I got, you know, feedback from professors. It's kind of scratched out on every pages. You know red scratched out on every pages. I was really upset. [sighs and blushes deeply]. So I realized my English writing really have serious problems. (Anne)

> I remember in the first semester when I had to write the first, very first, writing assignment. It's difficult [sighs and shakes her head]. Like to get one page is so hard. (Sangthien)

As the preceding excerpts show, the participants found writing academic English extremely challenging, both cognitively and emotionally. One reason they found their first experience of writing in graduate school so difficult was that they generally had little or no experience of writing academic English before coming to graduate school. Most of the writing they had done in college English classes in their own countries had been informal and expressive:

> [In Korea] we wrote like diaries, journals, essays about what your ideal husband look like ... it's totally different [from here]. (Becky)
>
> We only wrote like a paragraph, so writing a thesis—long paper—[for her U.S. master's degree] was so hard. [In Japan] we practiced a lot of writing about feelings—we wrote journals every day. (Mizuki)

For most of these students, exposure to the genre of academic writing did not occur until they entered graduate school in America. It is no wonder, then, that their first writing assignment came as such a shock, as they described:

> I thought I was doing right. Then all of a sudden I got this paper back and it's horrible. That was kind of my awakening moment. (Becky)
>
> Before getting feedback from professors, I knew I have mistakes in my writing—but the real reality was different from my imagination. I was very upset. (Anne)

Moreover, the students recognized that the academic writing genres in which they were now expected to write were different from the academic genres they had been familiar with in their own countries. Mizuki described how she used to get confused between writing in English and Japanese academic style: "I got mixed up with Japanese composition, which is like totally opposite—you can never be clear about things—they're totally different styles." All of the students were able to describe differences between American academic writing and the academic writing style in their own countries, as Becky illustrated:

> [In America] you put the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph. [In Korea] we don't do that much. We put the important sentence at the end

> of the paragraph. It is considered more humble, a humble way to express yourself, and you should be humble as a scholar ... so I did that [in America] because it's what I'm used to. But nobody noticed what I'm saying!

Considering how little exposure to academic writing in English most of these students had before attending graduate school in the United States, it is surprising that the students were able to adjust as well as they did. One practice that the students found instrumental in helping them meet the writing requirements of their programs was seeking out opportunities for dialogue with friends, instructors or writing tutors, and with the text.

Dialogue With Friends

The students used dialogue with friends and classmates to help them in various ways, and the nature of the help they needed seemed to determine which friends they went to for help: When they needed help with understanding the subject matter, the participants often went to other international students for help, as Keiko described:

> I usually studied with another international student who was very serious and helped me. Also there's a wonderful Japanese graduate student in statistics, and he can always help me with everything.

However, when they needed help with writing in English, they usually went to American friends. In the following passage, Becky explains how she was able to learn from her American friends:

> I learn to use different words, like *argue* or *claim*—not the same word all the time ... and I learn things like parallel structure.

However, although they did ask their friends and classmates for help, the students reported that were often hesitant to do so, either because they felt embarrassed at showing others their "poor" writing or because they didn't want to waste their friends' time. One student, Anne, reported that although she occasionally asked friends for help, she felt that she didn't learn from their help:

> Even though I asked a student in my department to read my paper, I think writing skill is different .... I think I need to talk to expert in English writing for international students ... experts in English can help me through the conversation with me—help me reorganize my paper. If I ask a friend in my department, she can't explain *why*. It's not really understandable to me.

Anne felt the need to speak to someone who could not only correct her errors but could also explain them, and for this she sought help from a writing tutor.[4]

Dialogue With Tutors and Instructors

Anne was not alone in thinking the help she could get from a writing tutor was qualitatively different from the help she received from friends. Both Keiko and Becky felt that discussing the paper with a tutor helped them to get a new perspective on their writing:

> Before I show some work to you, I may think it's okay, and then, when I explain it to you, I notice it's not really good. I need to rewrite some parts .... Sometimes I notice after I write something, if it's not clear to you, it's not clear to anybody. That's when there's a better way to explain it. (Keiko)

> We just go through and you ask me questions like "What do you mean by this sentence?" you know, "Why do you use this word here?" And that makes me think about my whole structure, so after I come back and I tear it down and I rewrite it. It really helps me to structure clearly. (Becky)

These passages suggest that dialogue with a tutor meant more than just proofreading; by discussing their paper with another person the students were not only reorganizing their papers or acquiring new words but also developing their thoughts.[5]

Sangthien, the only student who already had experience of doing academic writing in English before coming to America, reported taking part in another kind of dialogue, an internal dialogue with an English instructor who had taught her several years earlier. Whenever she wrote, she heard in her head the voice of the man she called "my scary English teacher":

> Whenever I'm writing, I hear his voice: "Show don't tell! This sounds unnatural! You are sounding Thai!" It's horrible, but it's a good warning; it's like stuck on the back of my head.

Although Sangthien disliked hearing the injunctions of her English teacher ringing in her head whenever she wrote, she felt that hearing his voice did make her a better writer. When she wrote, she was always responding to his comments, whether she wanted to or not.

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[4]In the cases of Anne, Becky, and Keiko, I was the tutor with whom they worked. As a result, they may have overstated the importance of the help they received from a tutor in order to make me feel appreciated.

[5]This is an example of the development that occurs when working in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. See Vygotsky (1978) for a full discussion.

When the participants asked their content area instructors for help, they received a variety of responses. The participants all reported that although they could get help on the content of their papers (e.g., their understanding of the theories and concepts they were studying), they did not often feel they could get help on how to write their papers. The most common response from instructors was a suggestion that the students get editing help from friends, classmates, or writing tutors. A few instructors, however, were willing to help by going through papers with the students, especially if the assignment was an important one: Becky reported that her advisor invited her to his home, where he spent several hours going through her master's thesis with her. Other professors made allowances for their non-native speaking students by focusing on content rather than on surface errors. This last response, although well intentioned, sometimes led the students to have a false impression of their writing ability, as Becky described:

> The worst thing about my first semester is my professor gave me lots of writing assignment and he never correct any. He tried to understand what I'm saying and he gave me a good grade .... Then another professor, he's really picky, you know—correct everything. So I got my paper back and I was just shocked!

Although the students reported that their professors seldom gave them explicit help in appropriating the academic writing genre, they all reported getting help elsewhere: from the academic texts they read.

Dialogue With the Text

When I asked Sangthien how she had learned to write in the genre of her field, her response was immediate: "I learned it from reading!" All the participants reported learning through dialogue with the text and, in describing to me how they approached their writing assignments, all of them mentioned going back to the text throughout the writing process. It was Sanghthien who articulated most clearly the dialogic nature of her reading, and this point is particularly striking if one compares her comments with those of Bakhtin (1986):

> If I have no idea how I'm going to do it [a writing assignment], I'll have to ask the classmates. Yeah, I'll talk with my classmates, [say], "How would you do it?" And then if it's still not clear, I'll ask the professor. And then I go to the library to find the articles of something else on that topic. *I need to see what other people think about that. And then I kinda make notes about other peoples' opinions on ~~the topic and I use~~ that in my writing ... and kinda like, I think along the same lines, like do I agree with this? Or this is not good* (italics added).

> When the listener perceives and understands the meaning of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it, augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution and so on. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68)

In the preceding passage, we can see that Sangthien goes through various kinds of dialogue in responding to a challenging writing assignment: She talks with friends, with the instructor, and with the texts themselves. Clearly, her reading is a very dialogic process, as she interrogates the authors she reads and then interrogates herself about her response to the readings. I believe that the dialogic process Sangthien goes through in writing plays a major role in helping her to be the accomplished writer that she is.

INDIVIDUALITY IN ACADEMIC GENRES

When I asked the participants if individuality and originality were important in the genres in which they wrote, they responded differently according to their fields. The four students in the social sciences responded quite definitively, "no": Although it was important to have original ideas, it was not important to show originality in expressing those ideas. In other words, they did not consider individual writing style to be important in the genres in which they wrote.

However, Becky, the graduate student in history, believed that original ideas and individual writing style were both important, and she said that the degree to which individual writing style was valued depended on where the history department was located:

> Sometimes history departments are located in social sciences and sometimes in the arts. My history department is located in the college of arts, so I have to try to write in an artistic way. I have to try to be individual, but some professors say you can learn that by finding someone whose style you like and imitating it. Then you can find your own style. I am trying to find my own style, but it's hard! I didn't find it yet!

Becky's words echo Atkinson and Ramanathan's (1995) findings about the different genres found in English classes depending on whether they are located in English or applied linguistics departments. They also support Bakhtin's (1986) notion that in order to understand a genre it must be studied in its historical context.

While the four students in the social sciences did not feel the need to express individuality in their writing, they did feel some tension between expressing others' ideas and expressing their own ideas, and nowhere was this more apparent than in writing the literature review, which all five stu-

dents thought was the most difficult part of writing a research paper. In the following passage, Mizuki expresses the frustration she felt about having to reproduce others' ideas. She said that in writing the literature review, she often felt as though she were "stealing" others' ideas rather than dialoguing with others:

> The literature review is soooo hard for me. Put all the quotes together but not quote, just put in my own words. I feel like I'm creating something I'm not supposed to. *I feel like I'm stealing.* You know, people say, you have to use your own words, but I have to use *someone else's academic writing* pattern anyway, so it's not really my own words—I'm just copying people anyway.

In this passage, Mizuki seems to feel constrained, not just by having to reproduce others' words but by having to write in a writing pattern, or genre, that is not her own. Mizuki frequently expressed her desire to be original and creative, and we can infer from her words above that she felt constrained by this particular characteristic of the genre.

A Bakhtinian perspective on Mizuki's frustration is that she is caught up in the struggle to appropriate those others' words without losing her own. "Language," Bakhtin wrote, "is not a neutral medium; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (1981, p. 294). The fact that all the students in this study mentioned (unsolicited) that they found the literature review the most difficult section to write shows that they were all caught up in this struggle. As non-native speakers, they found the struggle to simultaneously wrest these words from others and reaccentuate them with their own intentions very challenging, especially as they had to balance the genre's demand for acknowledging the research of others with presentation of their own original ideas. This is a difficult challenge even for experienced writers writing in their first language.

WRITING AUTHORITATIVELY WITHIN THE GENRE

On the question of what lends authority to one's writing, the participants were united in their opinion: Authority comes from comprehensive knowledge of the field and from having original ideas:

> If you can show you read all the important sources, even secondary ones, and you really know your field, you can have authority. (Becky)

Contrary to my expectations, the participants did not feel that using the jargon or terminology of their fields lent authority to their writing, possibly

because they took using such language for granted as it is so much a part of the genre. As Anne put it, "I have to use those important words and expressions anyway." They did agree, however, that an essential way of lending authority to their work was to cite the important scholars in their field. This is in line with previous findings about the use of citations in academic writing (Baynam, 1999; Dong, 1996; Swales, 1990).

One factor that all participants agreed prevented them from writing authoritatively was their level of English proficiency. Sangthien and Becky,[6] who both mentioned that they often thought about their readers as they wrote, worried about how their readers would judge them. Becky felt that her English proficiency was the major factor that both undermined her authority and prevented her from developing a more distinctive style:

> When I write, I feel timid. I want to use some creative expression, but I think maybe [the readers] will not understand me, so I write simple and clear. It makes me timid.

Even though these students felt confident about their knowledge of their fields and the originality of their ideas, they felt hampered by the fear that their readers would misunderstand them. It was this fear that made several of the participants state that seeking assistance from a writing tutor was invaluable. Keiko said that working with a writing tutor "improves the quality of my written work so people can focus on content—not about English problems."

MASTERY OF GENRES IS LIMITED

On the basis of the high grades these students received on their papers, the assistantships they held, and the articles some of them had already published, all of them had succeeded in mastering the genres of their fields. However, they all mentioned that spending so much time immersed in these genres affected their use of other speech genres: Keiko reported being very critical of the vocabulary and argumentation in everything she read, even in fiction; moreover, influenced by the quantitative methodology that predominates in her field, she repeatedly tried to rephrase the interview questions I asked her so that she could give me a quantitative response. Becky reported a tendency to use American rhetorical style ("Give a thesis statement, then support!") even in conversation with friends. However, four of the students reported spending a lot of time with Ameri-

[6]Although Sangthien and Becky worried about how readers might judge their work, their awareness of audience may well have contributed to their being the most skilled writers among the group.

can friends and thus had plenty of opportunities to acquire different speech genres, especially those of casual conversation. For one student, though, the case was otherwise: Anne reported that the only genre in which she felt proficient was the genre of academic writing. Like the scholarly man referenced by Bakhtin (1986, p. 80), Anne felt at a loss when she had to speak or write "in layman's terms":

> This is a really drastic thing to me: Sometimes we have to write out the study results in layman's terms, because we need to report to workers in the site, so we need to write really easy to read. It is really difficult for me to write layman's expressions. My professor asked me, "Please write easily—this is really academic." So nowadays I realize my writing skills or patterns are really extreme—too academic—so that's not good for me.

Anne's solution to this problem was to try to find time to read non-academic books (she mentioned *Who Moved My Cheese?* [Spencer, 1998] and the *Harry Potter* books), and she hoped that by reading such books she would be able to master more everyday speech genres. Perhaps this problem was more severe for Anne because, unlike the others, she reported that she spent most of her time reading the literature of her field, and she said that when she socialized with others, it was mostly with Korean-speaking friends. Whereas the other students had mastered a variety of speech genres, Anne felt that she had mastered only the genre of academic writing.

IMPLICATIONS

Mastering speech genres is, as Bakhtin (1981) maintained, a struggle. For non-native speakers of English it is still more challenging. In describing speech genres, Bakhtin (1986) compared the way we acquire them to the way we learn our native language:

> We are given these speech genres in almost the same way that we are given our native language, which we must master long before we begin to study grammar. We know our native language—its lexical composition and grammatical structure—not from dictionaries and grammars but from the concrete utterances we hear and that we ourselves reproduce in live speech communication with others around us. (p. 78)

However, non-native speakers of English rarely have the opportunity to acquire English speech genres in the same way that they acquire the speech genres of their native language. All too often, they have learned much of their English from dictionaries and grammar books. A major implication of this study, then, is that such speakers should have the opportunity to acquire the genre of academic English through dialogue, and not only through dialogue with the texts they read. The students in this study sought

out opportunities for dialogue with friends, with writing tutors, and with their professors; however, not all students are willing or able to do so.

To encourage students to find opportunities to dialogue with others, we need to build opportunities for dialogic interaction into their writing classes and, ideally, into their content courses. Although collaboration is now gaining a toehold in writing classes, many writing instructors, perhaps motivated by fear of plagiarism and by Western notions of individualism (Pennycook, 1996; Scollon, 1994; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999), still believe that their students should "do their own work" rather than dialogue with others. One way to make composition classes more dialogic would be for their instructors to arrange for students to work with tutors in a writing laboratory or learning center. By working with tutors, students will create zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) in which they can develop their thoughts and organize their ideas. Through dialogue with a tutor they can also gain a better sense of audience, as their reader (i.e., the tutor) will be able to give them immediate feedback on their work.

In the case of international graduate students, access to tutoring services is still more important, as working with a tutor may be the only opportunity they have to focus on improving their writing skills, and academic writing *per se* is seldom explicitly taught in their departments. Tutoring also has an affective dimension, which should not be overlooked (Krabbe & Krabbe, 1993; Lepper, Woolverton, Mumme, & Gurtner, 1995). Mastering academic English is challenging both emotionally and cognitively. In my work as a tutor, I have often met international graduate students who are overwhelmed by the challenges they face. Knowing that they have somewhere to turn for help is an immediate relief, and when the emotional burden is lightened, they are more able to meet the cognitive challenge.

Teaching writing at the graduate level is also of critical importance. Rose and McClafferty (2001) called for the teaching of writing in graduate education; I would go further and suggest teaching a writing class specifically for international graduate students. Considering how little exposure the students in the present study had had to academic writing in English before coming to the United States, they could all have benefited from such a class. The class I envision would have both whole-class and one-on-one activities and, rather than writing assignments specifically for the class, students would be able to work on assignments from their content areas, thus benefiting from scaffolded learning about the characteristics of their academic genres and from opportunities for individual tutoring. Such a class would also be an ideal setting to encourage students to read and write in a more dialogic way.

In this study, two of the most skilled writers I interviewed had taken classes (in their content areas) that had encouraged a dialogic approach to reading and writing. Sangthien had taken a class in which she had been re-

quired to critique others' work and to find support for her critiques in the literature. Although she found it a tough class, she said it had taught her to read more analytically and to respond to others' work more critically. Becky took a class in which she was always encouraged to write with a reader in mind (a real reader, not just the instructor) and to imagine how the reader would respond to her writing. Teaching students these kinds of dialogic strategies has the benefits of challenging students to think more deeply and to write more persuasively.

In terms of understanding the dialogic processes these students went through to master the written genres of their fields, Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) theories of dialogism and speech genres provided a useful analytical lens for the present study. However, there is much more in Bakhtin's work that is relevant to the study of second language learning. Bakhtin has much to teach us about the vital importance of context, an area that has sometimes been overlooked in the area of second language acquisition. Future research could also incorporate concepts such as addressivity, voice, and double voicing—concepts that have generally been addressed only in first-language writing research. Bakhtin has much to offer the field of second language teaching and research; his contribution to the study of language is unique and, to use his own favorite metaphor, his utterances forged links in a chain that is likely to stretch far beyond him. I encourage readers to add their own links to the chain.

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