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AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MY BILITERACY WRITING PRACTICES AS AN  
AKAN SPEAKER OF ENGLISH: IMPLICATIONS FOR L2 WRITING

GABRIEL OPARE

119 Pages

In this thesis, I discuss my academic literacy socialization practices, particularly my linguistic and social adjustments in US graduate school. This autoethnographic study utilizes stories and evidentiality (corpus from my graduate school papers) as self-reflective epistemologies to understand my literate practices in a US academic discourse community. Contributing to the scholarship on the academic socialization of transnational graduate students in the US, I discuss and analyze my stories and experiences around academic writing practices in navigating graduate school's academic requirements and expectations in the context of higher education in the United States. By focusing on my lived experiences as a Ghanaian student pursuing an MS degree in English in the US, I emphasize teaching both L1 and L2 writers and instructors the value of multicultural literacies and reflexive studies. Additionally, I emphasize that international students should be bold and unapologetic in centering their voices, counter-stories, and identities in their educational environment without falling into any racial and scholarly hegemonies.

KEYWORDS: Academic Literacy Socialization , Academic Trajectory, Autoethnography,  
Reflexivity, Multiliteracies, Translingualism, Transnational Students, Writerly Voice

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GABRIEL OPARE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of English

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2023

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AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MY BILITERACY WRITING PRACTICES AS AN  
AKAN SPEAKER OF ENGLISH: IMPLICATIONS FOR L2 WRITING

GABRIEL OPARE

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The United States unequivocally has become an education hub for most international students in higher educational contexts, most especially Ghanaian students. From my experience as a student from Ghana who started this graduate school hunting process in Fall 2019, the motivation to pursue graduate studies in the United States was borne out of the good education, instructional facilities, and faculty's readiness to support students' research and success in navigating their graduate school trajectory. Though I had not had hands-on experience as a student in a US University or College, I had friends in these institutions who shared joyous stories of the successes they have chalked in terms of fundamental knowledge acquisition in their respective disciplines and the formidable institutional structures that support their learning and research. Mahalingappa et.al (2021) mention that the number of linguistically diverse international students who have decided to pursue graduate education in Europe and America has significantly and steadily grown in the last two decades with the US having the largest number of international students in the world. Schneider (2018) also states that the upsurge in the number of international students has brought changes in demographics in US institutions. Over the years, the American embassy has issued countless number of F-1 student visas to many students in Africa, including Ghana, where such numbers are high considering the large number of Ghanaian students who get admitted into reputable US institutions. The News and Events of the US embassy in Ghana report that 4,916 Ghanaian students had enrolled in US institutions of higher education for various master's and Ph.D. programs for the 2021/2022 academic year, which constitutes a sixteen percent growth from the previous year. Matsuda (2006) asserts that there has been an increase in the number of international students between the 20th and 21st centuries and contends that despite this, second language writing in US composition classrooms has not been addressed. His arguments are premised on "the myth of linguistic homogeneity" (Matsuda, 2006, p. 638), which assumes that "composition students are

native speakers of a privileged variety of English” (Matsuda, 2006, p. 638). This assertion dismantles language difference and diversity in translanguaging spaces per the linguistic diversity of US classrooms. I do not share these statistics and literature on the sprout in the number of international students to bore readers of this work but significantly, I find the upsurge in the number of international students’ profound to understanding the multiplicity of people who make the United States a site of multilingual interaction and engagement as well a call to attention on the intricacies of multilingual writing. The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in a revised positional statement in May 2020 mention that institutions around the world have significantly become multilingual in nature where students bring with them a plethora of distinct linguistic and cultural artifacts and resources that should be valued to ensure success in their academic journey.

For the purposes of helping readers of this work who are new to the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics, I would define the term multilingual writers to better situate it in the context of this study. The CCCC (2020) defines multilinguals as students or writers for whom English may be a second, third, fourth, or fifth language. In addition, the Conference on College Composition and Communication CCCC (2020) expands the definition of multilingual writers to encompass those with F-1 student visas, refugees, lawful permanent residents, undocumented immigrants, as well as those who are citizens of the United States and Canada by birth or who have acquired citizenship through naturalization. The above information is important to better understand the unique characteristics of multilingual writers in terms of their make-up, acculturations, and communities they inhabit, which I am part of.

As international students come to the US to advance their education, they also come with embodied writing cultures, rhetorical practices, and educational literacies. Most international students may not have the opportunity to develop voice to tell compelling narratives of how they navigate their academic writing in new discourse communities, often due to factors such as being new to the

academic disciplines, linguistic, cultural, racial, and intellectual marginalization they face in their new environments. In this thesis, I seek to contribute to scholarship on transnational writing literacies by engaging in personal reflections to understand my own dual language practices, specifically as I compose written texts for graduate school. I believe that understanding these discursive practices through reflexive and narrative-based accounts is essential for understanding the rhetorical practices and writing traditions of international students and a more-structured way of ascertaining how bilinguals compose texts and make meaning in transnational spaces. Understanding translingual acts of graduate students from a Ghanaian student's perspective through a reflexive and an autoethnographic account will contribute to our knowledge base on translingual identity enactments. The audience for this study is of multi-perspective—it targets many people who can learn from or benefit from this research. It is an advocacy-oriented project that goes beyond self-benefits of just putting my multilingual self out there; instead, it extends to people who have tacitly held on to monolingualism—a one side view of English as preponderant over all other languages which are deemed minoritized. This study is a space to “talk back” at institutions with monolithic monolingual perspectives about the use and appropriation of the English language, most especially within the context of US education. Some scholars in this realm of monolithic ideas about the use of the English language arrogate to themselves the power to mark languages of L2 writers and students as mistakes; therefore, this thesis is an opportunity to self-advocate (using myself as a mouthpiece) to value and valorize the unique linguistic make-up of multilingual writers. This study will contribute to the body of scholarship and pedagogy around critical multilingualism, which aims to recognize the legitimacy and value of people who communicate with a multitude of linguistic repertoires. There is a steady growth of research in this area in the field of TESOL and Applied linguistics, but we do not always get to read autoethnographic works from students and writers from Ghana. Therefore, this work will add to other autoethnographic works from a Ghanaian student's perspective on the literate practices

of graduate international students in a new educational environment. As a field, we need more voices within the novice membership to bring out powerful narratives that elucidate the uniqueness of multilingual writing. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do I develop a writerly voice in academic writing?
2. What are some of the challenges and affordances I meet as I engage in writing for graduate school as an Akan speaker of English?
3. What resources and spaces are available to transnational students to enact their biliterate practices in U.S. graduate programs?

My research questions will help fill the gap mentioned above as well as contribute to the existing knowledge on autobiographical accounts of transnational writers in graduate school, considering the fact that the challenges around developing writer identity for transnational writers, especially writers whose English and non-English languages are not always recognized in academic spaces still permeates in our academic circles. For a long period of time, racist ideologies about language usage have superintended academic spaces. This space overtly accepts White language norms as right and black/African language practices as wrong. This thesis is a call targeted at rethinking and rewriting the narratives on linguistic racism and linguistic justice. Baker-Bell (2019) suggests an “Anti-Racist Black Language Pedagogy that consciously arms black students with space to make sense of, name, investigate, and dismantle anti-black linguistic racism and white linguistic hegemony” (p. 6). Baker-Bell (2019; 2020) specifically discusses the use of African American Vernacular in public school domains and raises concerns about the anti-black language movement in public schools focusing on student interviews and her own observations of classroom discourse. Her work also indexes that conscientizing black students to reject their linguistic resources in literacy learning, rob them of their identities that push them to internalize White Mainstream English (WME) as the norm. My study is different in this stance, despite its anti-racist underpinnings of promoting culturally sustaining

pedagogies. Therefore, this work is also an opportunity to push forward an agenda of reiterating the resourceful nature of language usage, especially the use of English language variations and non-English languages, in institutional and academic spaces which are subtly considered inferior.

Similarly, transnational writing teachers, particularly Graduate Teaching and Research Assistants in US institutions, can greatly benefit from this study to better understand how they navigate their writing in their disciplinary discourses. My explicit mention of the audience of this study is very important because it will help me contextualize my discussions within the lens of authorities, practitioners, scholars, and teachers that I direct the message of this work to. This project is not just to share stories but to encourage others also to share their stories. Significantly, I am not in any position of entitlement to share the experiences of all Ghanaian international student populations; however, this work has the propensity to cover the experiences of many Ghanaian international graduate students in the US since they may have had similar educational experiences but have not gotten an opportunity or the confidence to write about them. I must admit that it has taken a great of relentless thought processes on whether I want to put my experiences on this two-year journey of navigating this academic trajectory out there; but, over these months of thinking through this work, I have garnered the needed confidence to put myself out there because I have come to accept that my story is a unique embodiment of who I am and no one can tell the story better than myself as the experiencer of all the events that have culminated into writing this thesis. Reflexivity has become an important tool in Applied Linguistics for learning about people's cultural ways of being. Pavlenko (2002;2007) mentions that there is much value in reflexivity in academic contexts because narratives are rich sources of data in studying people's lived experiences. Similarly, Gramer (2017) asserts that "embodied experience is better understood as endlessly complex and deliciously messy" (p. 43). In as much as some of these experiences and writing practices I embody are messy and nuanced, I confidently think that it is a summation of the joys and pains of being socialized in a new transnational

environment and can be best told by myself. Canagarajah (2019), in his seminal work on transnational autobiographies, asserts that most autobiographies have been told through the voices of people who are not multilingual (native speakers who are researchers) and positions that migrant students have had their experiences suppressed because of unsavory histories of undocumented entry into the US as well as well as “painful experiences of dislocation acculturation that they might avoid discussing” (Canagarajah, 2019, p. 18). Being a multilingual himself in the US academic discourse community, he even begins his literacy autobiographies of his students by first telling readers of his own narrative in Sri Lanka through to being a graduate student at Bowling Green State University. In his literacy development, he chronicles the cultural shocks he experienced in his text construction where his instructor used a lot of red pens to consistently mark out his spelling errors, mechanical inaccuracies (punctuations), incoherent paragraphs and his Sri Lankan idiomatic expressions as syntactic errors. For Canagarajah (2019), writing was a way of putting and writing himself out of his texts, therefore the instructor’s feedback was shocking to him. Admittedly, a chunk of the extrinsic motivation I gathered to do this work was from how Canagarajah (2019) tells the trajectory of his literacy development as a multilingual writer. By telling his story, he gives power and credence to minoritized voices to externalize their unique linguistic orientations and translingual identities. I strongly think that it is important for international students to be intentional and unapologetic in centering their experiences, literacies, counter-story, voices, and language peculiarities without falling into the trap of western superiority and scholastic hegemony. Pratt (1991), on emphasizing the powerful nature of autoethnographic texts, mentions that “such texts often constitute a marginalized group’s point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture” (p. 35). As a student and budding scholar, this work is also an entry point for me to enter into research in Applied Linguistics to center my arguments, epistemologies, and contributions on translingual writing. With this in mind, one of the goals of this thesis is to examine the complexities and linguistic resources that I brought into the knowledge



production in US classrooms that was either successful or unsuccessful. My choice of this method of inquiry is rooted in decolonizing ways of producing research that are considered illegitimate or invalid.

Kubota (2022) states that

Decoloniality also challenges conventional ways of conducting and disseminating research in second language writing. It critiques the hegemony of White Eurocentric norms that dictate what inquiry topics, theories, or research methodologies are more legitimate than others and excludes alternative epistemologies arising from the global South. (p. 2)

What this means to me is that, as the field of second language writing is growing, there should be room for other ways of producing knowledge and scholarship, which were hitherto counted as the unnatural way of research production. My choice of autoethnography as a methodology is a way of talking back at systems that oppress and subvert literacy development accounts shared from personal stories and experiences as counterfeit and illegitimate forms of research. Self-knowledge may exist as an invaluable epistemology by some scholars; however, understanding the discursive literate practices of graduate international students through autoethnographic studies is essential in valorizing indigenous voices as well as racial minority populations. The academia's obsession with objectivity is an epistemological problem that needs to be addressed.

Many academics emphasize that these autoethnographic studies are becoming more common in a variety of contexts, including those outside the classroom, and that this calls for additional research in the area (Canagarajah, 2019). Gramer (2017) in vitalizing the power of narrative research mentions that narrative research is a way of destabilizing the stories of those who have arrogated themselves power in certain jurisdictions. Several scholars in the field of Applied Linguistics have done narrative-based work in the area of graduate student academic socialization as well as teacher experiences that have been a major source of inspiration and research guidance in my work (Belcher (1994; Duff,

(2003); Sanchez-Martin & Seloni (2019); Schneider 2018; Seloni (2012); Zappa-Hollman, 2007). These studies generally looked at multilingual graduate students' struggles in new educational environments, mentorship, and collaborative networks that help international students to enact their literate practices, the use of institutional academic spaces by graduate international students as well as mediational resources that international students bring in their new academic discourse communities. In situating my study within this pool of studies that look at international graduate student socialization, my work expands on them by looking at academic socialization from a first-person point perspective, where I tell the narratives as the experiencer of the actual event because most of these works described the multilingual experience from a teacher perspective.

As Canagarajah attests, "autobiographies are adding to scholars' understanding of proficiency development in languages and literacies" (Canagarajah, 2019, p. 23). For me as a budding scholar in the field of Applied Linguistics and TESOL, this autoethnographic study is a way of adding up to the value of stories and anecdotal experiences that shape literacy development across a period of time. My experiences in walking through this academic threshold would have been silenced, unknown and glossed over if not for the opportunity of a research methodology like autoethnography that helps to revitalize individual experiences in seemingly new cultural environments. Pratt (1991) mentions that "an autoethnographic text refers to a piece of writing in which the author attempts to engage with the representations of others while also attempting to define themselves" (p. 7). Her arguments here also constitute a greater portion of my choice of this method of inquiry because this work will also give me a rare opportunity to rewrite narratives that have sought to denigrate what multilingual students epitomize as against contrary Western representations of who they are.

Moreover, I want to emphatically acknowledge the institutional factors that has contributed to my understanding of translingual acts of writing. By this, I refer to Illinois State University's Department of English, that has helped me immensely to understand how cultures, communities and

language intersect in writing. Unlike other quintessential English graduate programs in the United States, ISU's English department and its robust writing program helped me to see and understand writing differently—writing as a more situated activity that does not only consist of putting a string of words and sentences on a piece of paper. My initial understanding of writing prior to entering this master's program was limited but this has changed to a more cultural and nuanced understanding of the idea that various semiotic tools, resources, and spaces are all part of writing. My understanding of writing has changed from a linear view to a more complex stance of what writing is. This epiphany about writing has also played a greater role in undertaking this study which is worthy of mention.

The purpose and significance of this study are to foreground and articulate issues of identity construction through my writing and how important identity is for multilingual writers as they navigate new academic discourse communities. Canagarajah (2019) also asserts that identity development is part of one's biliteracy embodiment and that narrating your own experiences of writing helps writers to externalize and verbalize their experiences and histories that may have been forgotten and suppressed. I believe strongly that the fears, joys, and painful experiences multilingual students go through imbibe in them marks of identity of who they are, what they have been through, and what becomes of them after they have been socialized into new writing ecologies. I will draw on my language and academic socialization practices and experiences to understand my sociolinguistic identities in my translingual environment.

Consequently, I also want to use this thesis to emphasize the importance of a writerly voice in multilingual academic writing. Hyland (2008) states that voice has been used in writing to express the author's presence, but for the most part, it has been thought of as having a minor role in academic writing. Voice is one of the major constructs that will be discussed in this study in terms of how it has positioned me as a legitimate member of my disciplinary discourse. Hyland (2001; 2008) argues that writers select from their repertoires useful rhetorical choices to communicate a persona and ideas that

are within their disciplinary boundaries. I will also analyze how developing a writerly voice through self and mention, and self-representation in my writing has imbibed confidence in me as a writer. Sanchez-Martin & Seloni (2019), in their reflexive study of dissertation mentoring, emphasize that one of the most difficult phases of multilingual writing is finding their disciplinary voice. Sanchez-Martin & Seloni (2019) posits that “disciplinary becoming” consists of all the discursive literate practices and knowledge that writers navigate in gaining expertise in the fields they are socialized into. For me, developing an academic voice has been a helpful tool that has unquestionably helped me to become a better writer in the course of time, which I have navigated confidently, lovingly, and emphatically. Similarly, in this thesis, I will show how this embodied voice has helped me develop an expressionist approach in my own writing. As someone who has struggled with being confident in what I write for many years in my academic writing papers, I will use this study to demonstrate how finding my own voice in academic writing has helped me in many ways to be successful in my journey as a graduate student, multilingual teacher of writing in the US context, and an emerging scholar.

Another purpose of this research is to give credence and reverberate minority groups whose languages and language practices have been misappropriated, undermined, or deemed illegitimate amidst the pluralistic nature of communication, social interaction, and engagements in the United States. I also want to use this thesis to create a safe space for international students to represent their knowledge and practices in academic scholarship.

Again, examining my own dual language practices which includes exerting black identities in my writing, shifts in writing perspectives across different cultural spaces and struggles of navigating a new educational terrain in terms of how I negotiate meaning across different writing or discursive situations will serve as a call to action to provide methodological and pedagogical examples for L2 teachers to design curriculum that focuses on bilingual students—their linguistic repertoires, language practices, and semiotic resources beyond the limitations of English language. The burgeoning

number of international and immigrant students in the United States, has made it expedient to value, valorize and utilize translanguaging practices in instructional design and delivery. Any contrary opinion, I believe, is inconsistent and inaccurate in accounting for the language socialization practices and distinct rhetorical practices of linguistically diverse students.

Finally, as a teacher who embraces social justice pedagogies, this work is particularly essential in construing the value of students' home literacies, acculturations, and writerly voices since most multilinguals use their L2 in navigating their academic trajectories. I believe that translanguaging as a pedagogical tool is rooted in social justice ideologies since it allows for fair and equitable representations of transnational identities.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Writerly Voice:** Ivanic & Camps (2001) define writerly voice as “expressions of the writer's own views, authoritativeness, and authorial presence” (p. 7). As a student, voice is a tool writers use and develop before or in the course of their writing trajectory that becomes a symbol of confidence and authority in their writing histories.

**Transnational students:** According to Canagarajah (2019), transnational students are students who have seemingly different national identities within the context of education in relation to cross-border communication. Examples include students from Ghana, China, Jamaica, etc.

**Academic socialization** refers to all the practices that students engage in within a specified educational threshold.

**Autoethnography/reflexive Study:** Pratt (1991) defines autoethnography as “a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (p. 35).

**Reflexivity:** According to Sharma (2021), reflexivity “is understood as a necessary practice through which researchers examine their subjectivities as key agents who shape the very social events they intend to investigate” (p. 230).

### **Conclusion and Overview of Chapter**

This chapter provided the exigency of the study as well as put into context the target audience, and the research gap and questions that the study seeks to answer in relation to contributing to scholarship on transnational writing. The next chapter reviews relevant literature on writerly voice as theoretical framework of the study that teases out critical discourse on the discursive strategies that are deployed by multilingual writers in their L2 composition.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I review relevant literature on writerly voice in academic writing as a keen tenet of L2 writing and instruction. Since this study critically examines my biliteracy journey as an international graduate student in a US context, reviewing relevant literature on voice as a crucial mark of the multilingual identity in a transnational educational environment is important in teasing out the intricacies of voice as a discursive strategy in multilingual writing. In my positionality as a multilingual writer, this literature review is also essential for my autoethnographic work as it expands the discourse around transnational writers' use of voice in academic writing, and voice as a crucial tenet of multilingual writing.

### **The Multilingual Experience: Voice as a Constituent of Multilingual Identity**

One of the keen pedagogical illuminations of studying and analyzing voice as a budding Applied Linguist is an eventual understanding of voice as an inclusive tenet of multilingual writing and writing instruction. Most multilingual students may not know how they construct voice in their writing because they might not have developed a rhetorical awareness of how certain features of their writing mark voice (Matsuda, 2001). They also might not have had writing instruction that focused on the importance of voice in one's identity. Hyland (2008) defines voice as "the ways writers express their personal views, authoritativeness, and presence" (p. 5). The two definitions above emphasize that behind the writings of people, there are distinct characteristics that identify the writers with what they write. As we engage in the nuanced ideologies of writing, we leave vestiges of ourselves through our written materials that enable our readers to see who we are in the absence of bodily contact and interaction. The definition of voice above reifies the pivotal role of voice in the academic trajectory of both native and non-native English writers. It is, therefore, crucial for teachers in both native and non-native English-speaking contexts to understand how L2 writers compose meaning and navigate discursive and non-discursive strategies of voice and identity as multilingual learners and writers.

In response to the disturbing trends in academic writing in the English-speaking world, it is unequivocal that multilingual writers face a lot of pressure when it comes to hiding their identities, as they are seen as “non-standard.” Multilingual writers are sometimes made ashamed of their writing styles. It is important to decolonize academic writing because marking idiosyncratic differences in writing and other linguistic peculiarities as non-standard is detrimental to building writer confidence in writers or students who are considered to have dual language competencies. From my anecdotal experience, I believe strongly that multilingual students should be unapologetic in exerting authorial presence and counter-discursive strategies in their writing that help account for their own agency and knowledge construction. Even though some scholars have belittled the role of voice in academic writing, voice, in my experience as an international graduate student has shown me that voice remains an important tenet of the L2 composition considering how I have shifted from being a mousy writer to a confident one through paying more attention to my writerly voice for different type of genres and audiences. Christiansen & Tian (2023), in their collaborative autoethnography, examine their English language learning and writing trajectory as transnational scholars in Applied Linguistics. They critically mention that though they advocate for translanguaging as a crucial pedagogy in the classroom and scholarship, they produce their academic manuscripts in English since writing in English makes them find their confident academic voice. As interesting as their experiences seem, their work highlights discrepancies between practicing what you preach ( finding confidence in English as well as advocating for translanguaging in their scholarship, while the journals they write in gate keep their papers from being published in dual languages). Stapleton (2002), and Helms-Park & Stapleton (2003) have argued that the emphasis on voice in academic writing is overly preponderant as it relegates other important aspects of writing as unimportant.

With regard to multilingual writers’ needs, Stapleton & Helms-Park (2008) expand the argument that “the large numbers of new L2 writers who are grappling with the fundamentals of



syntax, lexis, and textual organization need not be further burdened by (prescriptive) notions of voice” (p. 97). Their arguments put hierarchies on areas that need to be considered primal and fundamental in learning and writing in English by L2 writers—grammar and textual organization first before voice pedagogy. Even though the assertion by Helms-Park, R., & Stapleton, P. (2003) may be valid to some extent since there are other keen aspects of multilingual writing, such as concord, and vocabulary development, that equally need attention, voice has long been gaining prominence in a myriad of contexts in the fields of Applied Linguistics and Composition Studies it foregrounds distinctively nuanced strategies of voice in language specific contexts by different English writers. Cummins (1994) mentions that voice has become important in composition studies where voice is used to discuss issues of writer agency, reader relationship with writer and presence of the writer in a text. Similarly, Prior (2001) indicates that voice has developed as one of the composition pedagogies for non-native English writers, Matsuda & Tardy (2007) also posit that voice which is grounded in identity has become a center of research for many Applied Linguists. Stapleton & Helms-Park (2008), in their response paper to Matsuda & Tardy (2007), indicate that it is “perplexing since nowhere in either of our papers do we state that voice (however defined) is irrelevant to all or most academic writing” (Stapleton & Helms-Park, 2008, p. 95). However, Matsuda & Tardy (2007) indicate that:

It may be argued that voice does not play a role in academic writing situations where rubrics similar to the ESL Composition Profile are being used. Yet, that does not mean voice does not affect the quality of writing in those contexts; it may simply mean that the quality of writing is not defined or measured in ways that account for the impact of voice. (Matsuda & Tardy, 2007, p. 238)

The arguments by Stapleton & Helms-Park (2003) index that dwelling on voice is far less important in writing. However, it is important to note that in every facet of human communication and writing, one must bring themselves as an epistemology of writing. This means that telling writers

not to dwell on their voices in writing is like telling them to come to the classroom without their 'heads'. In the very existence of human interaction, people come to places with different dispositions of themselves by the clothes they wear and their identification with certain groups of people through non-verbal semiotic resources (smiles, strides, etc.) (Ivanic & Camps, 2001.) The act of self-representation is inarguably a human activity (Ivanic & Camps, 2001.) Voice should be treated as important as any structural aspect of the target language instruction and learning. In as much as voice is pivotal in academic writing, exerting voice in one's academic writing is nuanced, and context bound. Arguably, one's experience and knowledge of certain genres can play a role in assertiveness or non-assertiveness in writing, depending on the context of operation. This means one may feel very confident in one genre of academic writing on a topic they know very well or have developed some knowledge of but feel very hesitant and "mousy" in another context. Matsuda & Tardy's (2007) arguments show that in some contexts of L2 writing and instruction, there is inattention and lack of recognition of voice as a means to an end in the writing of multilingual students, which I believe is problematic and needs to be disrupted. How would writers bring their dispositions and agency into full force if they removed themselves from what they write? On concretizing voice as part of the multilingual identity, Matsuda (2001) argues against the idea of voice as an exclusively individualistic ideology. By individualism, Matsuda (2001) argues that voice is not a new concept to the "collectivist cultures" (p. 35). The assertion by Matsuda (2001) also corroborates the arguments by Hirvela & Belcher (2001) that multilingual writers are not voiceless writers. Hirvela & Belcher (2001) further argue that multilingual writers bring into their graduate education established and formidable identities in their cultures as well as trajectories of success in their academic and professional lives. Hirvela & Belcher (2001) argue that voice is not something to be taught and acquired but rather a tool to understand the nuanced experiences that characterize the transition from L1 and L2 writing. What multilingual writers with such profound dexterities and histories of success in writing will need is an

acknowledgment in their new locus of studies—an acknowledgment that does not besmirch their identities as successful writers in their places of old. Devaluing the writing histories of experienced multilingual writers in new environments puts them in the position of toddlers in the writing situation where they need to be scaffolded. The arguments by Hirvela & Belcher (2001) on voice as part of the multilingual identity are valid and true as I identify with their positionality. I started paying attention to how other writers and materials I read in graduate school helped me develop my own voice. Tracing my literate practices influenced me to delve deeper and investigate writerly voice in my academic writing. Most students and teachers may be unaware of the role of voice in academic writing and how voice significantly accounts for writer agency (Hyland, 2008).

A lack of rhetorical awareness is, therefore, baneful for multilingual writers since they may see themselves as having zero agency in their own writing. In my understanding, the problem of inattention to voice in L2 writers' academic writing is somewhat caused by academia's obsession with objectivity. To corroborate this assertion, Hyland (2008) mentions that academic writing does not welcome voice because readers and researchers are interested in objective evidence as against opinion. However, voice always exists even in evidential writing, such as argumentative genres or research papers. Kubota (2020) demonstrates how, in academic writing, epistemological racism privileges certain kinds of knowledge production as valid and others as invalid (self-representation, reflexivity accounts, etc.). To Kubota (2020), these types of research are somewhat sub-standard because they are seen as subjective studies, while academia is obsessed with neutrality that suppresses the agency of the writer. Similarly, Matsuda & Tardy (2007) also conclude that the chasm between personal and academic writing has led to conclusions that academic writing is impersonal and, therefore, voiceless. Seeing self-representation as an invaluable way of knowledge construction is problematic, considering how valuable self-mention and reflexivity have been seen in recent studies as valuable data sources (Pavlenko, 2002; 2007; Sanchez Martin & Seloni, 2019).

In my experience as a pre-service teacher in Ghana, we were told to write off ourselves in our essays; objectivity is what was deemed proper writing and research. This assumption impacted my writing, more specifically the early days of my graduate school journey in the US, I sometimes wanted to write off myself in my papers, but I kept doing a lot of self-mention. Seloni (2017), applying French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's theories of reflexivity, mentions that when we are engaged in reflexivity, we represent our embodied social histories. This assertion is true because, as a graduate student, it was seemingly unavoidable to be non-existent in my writing because making myself visible in my writing made me feel constitutive of the knowledge I was writing about. However, there are supports for reflexivity and self-mention in academia; Hyland (2001) sees self-mention "as a powerful rhetorical strategy for emphasizing a writer's contribution" (p. 207). Voice, then, is not "an optional extra" (Ivanic & Camps, 2001, p. 3). What may be the problem is that the discursive and rhetorical traditions/strategies of marking voice may be different from the target language and culture (Matsuda,2001). Within my own Akan traditions, it was a gendered cultural practice to be bold, assertive, and unapologetic in centering my voice and fighting for what is right. Even though I was taught to write objectively in my essays in school which contradicts my cultural foundations, my writing still had tones of power and assertiveness.

## **Drifts in Cultural Spaces of Learning: Voice Positionalities of Multilingual Writers**

Movements from one cultural space to the other can impact the way multilingual writers navigate their strategies of voice in new discourse communities. In Matsuda's (2001) work on the multiple voices of Japanese writers, he identifies that Japanese discursive features of voice are not the same as that of English; therefore, Japanese students studying in the US may have challenges negotiating voice in their writing. The paper investigates diverse discursive practices in marking voice in Japanese written materials and discusses the consequences for L2 writing research and education. In substantiating this claim, Matsuda (2001) analyzes electronic, written discourse and how voice is constructed in specific language domains through the usage of certain discursive features. Matsuda (2001) argues that the challenges Japanese students face in exerting voice in the target language are a result of the different ways voice is enacted in these two language domains (Japanese and English) and the strategy-specificities of constructing voice.

In Matsuda's work (2001) on the multiple voices of Japanese writers, he identifies that Japanese discursive features of voice are not the same as that of English; therefore, Japanese students studying in the US may have challenges negotiating voice in their writing. His assertion reveals how different cultural spaces of socialization may impact how we shuttle voice as pillars of writing. Kubota (2001) also argues in her critical work on how Japanese culture has been essentialized thinking where Japanese writers/students do not have or do not know how to assert their voice because of their culture.. Kubota (2001) fought with this line of thinking, asserting that it is also within Japanese culture that people know how to be critical or assertive. This dichotomous way of thinking, which impacts our teaching, creates stereotypes and other students who might not come from Western traditions. "Negotiating discursive identity is much less troublesome when the writer and the reader have lived through similar discursive practices" (Matsuda, 2001, p. 39). Like Hirvela & Belcher (2001), Matsuda

(2001) also establishes that voice is part of our everyday literate practices and does not need to be taught. Matsuda (2001) studies a web diary written by a Japanese woman who uses self-referential pronouns, and sentence-final particles to construct voice in her personal web diary). These nuances of voice in Japanese are used in various social situations to mark identity and voice. In the web diary, the writer uses *Washi* which is used by middle-aged men to establish a voice of strength. She also used sentence-final particles to assert and mark social orders of gender. All these constitute how voice is marked discursively in Japanese and how Japanese writers might exert such writing tendencies in the target language. Matsuda's (2001) findings reveal how different cultural spaces of socialization may impact how we shuttle voice as pillars of writing. The rhetorical traditions of one language may impact how certain positionalities of voice can be marked in the target language. The fact that such discursive features are not present in the target language does not mean L2 writers are voiceless. L2 teachers in transnational contexts should demonstrate understanding and accommodation for the various histories that surround the writing of transnational writers within the locus of target language writing. Such an accommodation will make teachers see L2 writers as having an already existent voice that needs to be factored into L2 instruction. Also, making known the discursive strategies of voice in the target language constitutes an essential part of visible pedagogy, where students are taught by teachers that voice is marked in various languages differently.

Hirvela & Belcher (2001), in their article on the multiple voices of multilingual writers, report the cases of three case studies of three professional multilingual writers that illustrate the propensity for L2 writing education and research to ignore the voices or identities that L2 writers already possess. In the case study, Fernando, who was admitted to the Ph.D. program in Mechanical Engineering at a US university, was placed in the university's ESL writing course. He was an established associate professor in Venezuela who had published in Spanish over 40 scientific research papers in his field.

He had dilemmas with being put on a tangent as a mere graduate student, and he described it as a “matter of confidence” (p .92). The transition from an established professor to a doctoral student meant he was no longer able to use the Spanish language which he had used to publish his research papers. He also established that he would not have a problem writing in English because he did not see much difference in using the two languages to write papers; he wanted to be recognized as a professor in a new discourse community. This means he was not developing a new voice or identity as a writer; rather, he was utilizing his prior writing in Spanish as well to suit his new circumstances as a Ph.D. student. In maintaining their stance on self-representation characteristics possessed by multilingual students, Hirvela & Belcher (2001) drew on Ede's (1992) notion of "situational voice” and “Voicing” by Cummins (1994), both similarly posit that these multilingual writers make necessary changes and bend as the rhetorical situation changes. The idea of situational voice in this circumstance means that experienced multilingual writers want some form of recognition in transnational spaces because, as multilingual students, our histories of education and academic writing experiences may be far greater than what L2 teachers in native English contexts envisage. This means that the situational voices are an addition to the voice repertoire they already possess (their native writing voice). The writers Hirvela & Belcher’s (2001) study brought into their graduate education in the US a trajectory of success in their academic and professional lives. The paper also establishes that the notion of “academese” English writing robs and suppresses the identities of multilingual students in native-speaker environments like the US. “Academese” English is grounded in native-speaker ideologies where there is a lack of recognition of the voices multilingual writers bring.

More importantly, in n an argument against dominant monolingual ideologies, Canagarajah (2006) argues that the dominant monolingual ideologies about writing prevent us from seeing the resources multilingual writers bring. In a similar fashion, Horner & Trimbur (2002) argue that “a tacit language policy of unidirectional English monolingualism has shaped the historical formation of U.S.

writing instruction and continues to influence its theory and practice” (p. 594). The arguments by Horner and Trimbur (2002) and Canagarajah (2006) unveil how the US classroom has subtly glossed over other language characteristics and identities, such as voice, even though the US is a site of mixed interactions of people from different historical contexts. If multilingual students have these kinds of ideologies, that their voices are not welcomed as people who communicate in a multitude of linguistic repertoires, it defeats the purposes of embracing world Englishes, translingual identities, and pedagogies.

Additionally, in understanding the voice peculiarities of multilingual students, Ivanic & David Camps (2001) also studied the thesis of six graduate students from Mexico studying in British Universities on how they navigate and negotiate representations of the self in their writing. They argue that just as prosodic features of spoken language enable interlocuters to construct the voice of self-representation, individual writing ‘carries’ voices of self-representation. Ivanic & David Camps (2001) mention that lexical, syntactic, and visual features of writing help construct identity and voice just as the prosodic features of spoken discourse do. This underlying theme of self-representation in the previous reviews has again resurfaced in this paper. More specifically, Ivanic & David Camps (2001) draw on Halliday’s (1985) three macro functions of language: (“ideational positioning,” -a writer’s way of representing the world around him/herself, (“interpersonal positioning,”)-a writer’s exertion of authoritativeness and relationship between the writer and the reader, and (“textual positioning”)- a writer’s way of constructing meaning in a text (p. 5). In terms of ideational positioning, the lexis these multilingual students used in their thesis reflected their disciplinary orientation and how they are welcomed into the scholarship of their areas of study. Their stance, beliefs, and values on topics also contribute to their ideational position. For instance, the use of the word “people” as against “men” in the thesis of one of the participant students of this study reveals his gender belief and gender



positionality (p. 14). The findings index how belief systems and cultural ways of being are grounded in the choice of lexis in writing and how those shape voice enactments.

### **Voice as Way of Communicating a Disciplinary Persona**

Voice as an L2 composition strategy has effects on how we write in various disciplinary discourses. Having a disciplinary voice means “using a language that establishes relationships between people, and between people and ideas” (Hyland, 2008, p. 7). This means that in our various disciplinary orientations as writers, we make use of certain distinct lexical items that communicate that we understand the conventions of the discipline; however, a lack of understanding of disciplinary voice can be problematic. Voice, then is nuanced rhetorical marker of not only exerting authorial identity but a means to bring ourselves to the body of scholarship we are engaged in. In accentuating novice writers’ difficulties, Zhang, S., Yu, H., & Zhang, L. J. (2021) posit that “novice writers constructing academic writing often encounter difficulties regarding the proficient use of disciplinary language” (p. 1). As junior members in different fields, we painstakingly take time to strategically notice how senior members of our disciplines write by studying how these experienced writers make certain rhetorical moves in research writing that we can imitate (Swales, 1990). Novice members utilize lexical bundles in their field to communicate that they are part of their disciplines because “a good command of lexical bundles could be indicative of a proficient and professional academic writer and is thus considered a pivotal skill for student writers” (Zhang, S., Yu, H., & Zhang, L. J. 2021, p. 1).

In a similar fashion, Hyland (2008) argues that “writers must recognize and make choices from rhetorical options available in their fields so they can convey a persona and appeal to readers from within the boundaries of their disciplines” (p. 6). As an important facet of writing, Matsuda & Tardy (2007) also establish that “it may be useful to consider the development of voice as one strand of the complicated process of discourse acquisition” (p. 246). In their study, they interrogated how peer reviewers created an author's discursive identity during a blind article review process for an

academic publication in the field of rhetoric and composition. They found out that the reviewers of the manuscripts presented themselves as authoritative members over the works they reviewed by dint of certain discursive features such as the use of (I) and high incidence of praise in the works they reviewed. The findings by Matsuda & Tardy (2007) connects with Prior's (2001) argument for a third view of voice as both personal and social as a useful pedagogy for second-language writing where "voice in this sense is typified, the voice of a collective subject linked to the complex of identities, social relations, topics, and discursive forms that are associated with a sphere of activity, a domain of attention (like the body), or a durable social locale" (Prior, 2001, p. 61). If various discursive and non-discursive features of novice writers' writing give readers an impression of who these novice writers are in terms of their background and rhetorical dexterity, then it is important to look at voice not only from a personal stance as Prior (2001) argues but see voice from a multifaceted stance that intricately illuminates how a myriad of social dispositions of the writer interlaces with the personal to construct voice. By seeing voice from a dual stance, readers and writers can have different purviews of who writers are behind their written materials or works which may include their gender disposition and other socially important identities.

In another study that examines writer dispositions of novice writers in academic writing, Matsuda & Tardy (2007) in their study found out that the gender disposition of novice writers was also identified by the reviewers because of the use of aggressive positioning in their arguments and the use of gendered pronouns such as (he) in their writing that indexes a masculine discourse. Synonymously, Sanchez-Martin & Seloni (2019) use collaborative autoethnography to share their identities as feminist academics in dissertation mentoring as a gendered activity where their acculturation as female multilingual academics puts them in a gendered positionality in the activity system of dissertation mentoring. In it, they discuss that citation as academic writing practice is complex that involves gender consciousness; also, they mention that finding your own disciplinary

voice is a very daunting experience for most multilingual writers from their experiences. As multilingual scholars, transdisciplinary becoming” is performative and how it can be gendered is an important missing link in the field. However, writerly voices may not be exerted in certain disciplines because of the academic culture that guards such fields. To corroborate this assertion, Hyland (2001) “While impersonality may often be institutionally sanctified, it is constantly transgressed” (p. 209). In this sense, Hyland’s (2001) argument is predicated on the idea that even though academia values personal contribution to the body of knowledge in disciplinary-specific contexts, academia paradoxically devalues self-mention, especially in the various scientific fields where “Writers are less visible in the texts they write” (Hyland, 2001, p. 217).

However, authorial presence cannot be rubbed off as needless because exerting authorial authority enhances credibility and promotes acceptance of one’s arguments because it is unavoidable for writers to present a particular persona of themselves in their arguments (Hyland, 2001). Identity negotiation is a constituent of voice as a rhetorical strategy; as people write and bring their dispositions into play, they reunite themselves with their roots and cultures. Canagarajah’s (2013) idea of envoicing strategies describes “the ways in which writers mesh semiotic resources for their identities and interests” (p. 50). In this sense, there are negotiations and co-construction of meaning that avoid shared assumptions about interlocutors in a given context. For instance, in his study, one of his participants from Arabia decided not to translate into English, some of the Arabic words in her poem because she wanted native speakers in her class to understand the hustle non-native English speakers go through in writing in English. The above scenario shows how challenging it is to bring your own voice into academic writing because one would have to think about the audience of their work to determine the appropriate linguistic and rhetorical choices to make.

Even though some spheres of disciplinary writing may expect new members to have a disciplinary persona through their writing, learning to write in a field relatively takes some time of

practice, intention, and watchfulness—My own experience as a junior member of the field of Applied linguistics evidence that it will take some time for novice members to wear the disciplinary culture of writing. To corroborate this assertion, Matsuda & Tardy (2007) argue that “over time, writers learn to enact and exploit disciplinary genres for multiple agendas, and, importantly, learn how their textual choices may be received and perceived by others” (p. 246). It is, therefore, the duty of experienced members in the fields to coach and mentor students to achieve competencies in disciplinary discourses; assumptions about the writing dexterity of new members within a field can be defective.

### **Conclusion**

To this end, this autoethnographic study will expand the works of the scholars mentioned in this review. By focusing on my own academic writing voice, which has been an important part of linguistic and social adjustments in graduate school in the US, I will demonstrate how voice as a formidable L2 composing strategy has helped me to develop a rhetorical awareness of my own multilingual literacies as well as how I have significantly become a confident writer within these two years of being socialized into a new academic discourse community.

In the next chapter, I describe autoethnography as an important method of inquiry in tracing and documenting my own bi-literate journey as an international student from Ghana.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

### **Introduction**

My choice of autoethnography is grounded in qualitative research methodologies that will enable me to dig deep into the research questions that the study answers. The research questions guiding this study are: how do I develop a writerly voice in academic writing? What are some of the challenges and affordances I meet as I engage in writing for graduate school as an Akan speaker of English? What resources and spaces are available to transnational students to enact their biliterate practices in U.S. graduate programs? These research questions necessitate an interpretive framework that would concretize my findings and analysis. According to Creswell (1994), qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1994, pp. 1-2). Creswell's (1994) conceptualization of qualitative research methodology is accurate because the focus of this study is on my experiences in graduate school and my discursive strategies of voice as a mark of assertiveness. Understanding my socially complicated, literate activities as contours of a multifaceted human educational trajectory requires autoethnography, which is grounded in qualitative research.

### **Autoethnography as a Methodology**

Autoethnography is the methodological approach of inquiry that will guide this study. Poulos (2021) mentions that autoethnography emanates from the Greek words “autós = self + ethnos = people + graphia” = writing” (p. 4). Poulos (2021) defines autoethnography as “an autobiographical genre of academic writing that draws on and analyzes or interprets the lived experience of the author and connects researcher insights to self-identity, cultural rules and resources, communication practices, traditions, premises, symbols, rules, shared meanings, emotions, values, and larger social,

cultural, and political issues” (p. 4). Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) also see autoethnography as a research methodology that systematically describes personal experiences that helps to reify cultural ways of being.

As a budding scholar in the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics, I see autoethnography as a method of research that encapsulates a representation of the self, reverberated through stories that capture who we were and what are in the present moment. As I begin to tell my experiences of navigating my graduate school trajectory, the definition I provide above is loaded with meanings—meanings that will be crafted in the storied experiences of who I was before embarking on this academic journey and who I am becoming—which is partly the by-product of being encultured in a new transnational academic environment. Some scholars have emphasized the productive role of autoethnography in understanding the learning experiences within a defined time; Ellis et al. (2011) state that “As a method, autoethnography is both process and product” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 273). Autoethnography is gaining ground and attention in a myriad of contexts and disciplines. Similarly, Pavlenko (2002), a strong advocate of the use of autoethnography in bilingual education and second language studies, mentions that stories that bilingual people embody and tell about their lives and lived experiences have become central to several interdisciplinary fields of study and it has extended bounds beyond literature “becoming both a focus of research and a rich source of data in several areas of linguistics, in particular, L1 acquisition, linguistic anthropology, socio-linguistics, and language education” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 213).

As a fundamental tool of knowing, narratives, as Gramer (2017), asserts, constitute ways of making meaning out of human experiences that utilize stories as mediational tools. In her research, she accentuates new writing teachers’ ways of ‘becoming’ teachers by utilizing stories as tools to trace five graduate students’ processes of developing teacher identity and ways of ‘growing’ to become writing teachers. I find her work useful as it helps me to think broadly on my own implicit and explicit

ways of how I learned to become a writing teacher in a new educational environment as well as how I navigated my Ghanaian student and teacher identity in the US context. Canagarajah (2019) also posits that linguistic/literacy autobiographies (LA) or autoethnographies, a term he uses interchangeably, is not a novel phenomenon of scholarship and goes on to establish that linguistic autobiographies are becoming popular because of the alternative forms of knowledge they bring. Similarly, Clandinin (2006) also firmly reiterate that “the need for both narrative ways of thinking about the experience and new narrative methodologies is becoming increasingly apparent” (p. 45). Poulous (2021) maintains that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most anthropologists sought to study cultures that were deemed primitive, which were mostly objectified accounts of these cultures through observation as an outside participant. The legitimacy of these objectified accounts of cultural practices and histories was questioned by some scholars because they believed that such accounts may be altered or not told from a point of truth—cultural biases from the researchers. They were accounts that were considered “fly on the wall” (Poulos, 2021, p. 6).

Consequently, in preference for more neutral accounts, autoethnographic studies emerged as a way to gain insights into “the richness of cultural lives and life practices of others cannot be fully captured or evoked in purely objective or descriptive language” (Poulos, 2021, p. 9). In this case, researchers assumed dual roles of being an active participant in the research as well as an observer. The benefit of writing autoethnographically is that it enables the researcher to write first-person stories that allow his or her voice to be heard, allowing them to move from being an outsider to an insider in the research (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). I believe strongly that narratives are powerful; they break, disrupt, and help regain consciousness when the experiencer tells them. Canagarajah (2015) argues that “this form of research is conducted and represented from the point of view of the self, whether studying one’s own experiences or those of one’s community” (p. 260). Similarly, in accentuating the benefits of autoethnography, Pavlenko (2007) mentions:

Altogether, autobiographic narratives offer three major contributions to research on SLA and bilingualism. First of all, they offer insights into people's private worlds, inaccessible to experimental methodologies, and thus provide the insider's view of the processes of language learning, attrition, and use. Secondly, they highlight new connections between various learning processes and phenomena, and, in doing so, point to new directions for future research. (pp. 164-165).

For me, as a graduate international student in the United States, this autoethnographic study has given me an opportunity to tell how I have been able 'do' the graduate school journey, sharing accounts of joy, successes, and pain. Without such an approach of inquiry, I would not have been able to put my multilingual self out there. Clandinin (2006) states that narrative inquiry is a good method of "studying people's experiences in school" (p. 48). As a student who has embraced decolonial ways of thinking, writing, and teaching, my choice of autoethnography as a methodological design is rooted in some well-meaning purposes of pedagogical value. The first reason or significance of this methodology is to contribute to the discourse and contention on autoethnography as a legitimate research methodology. Kubota (2022), in his recent publication on decolonizing second language writing, articulates a very crucial subject that has plagued the field of second language writing—accepting other ways of knowing and doing research. Some of the research methods of inquiry have been problematized and questioned, most especially narrative forms of inquiry, including autoethnographies. My understanding of decolonial ways of thinking, writing, researching, and producing knowledge is that it peels away all biases, cultural assumptions, and occlusion of other non-quintessential ways of doing research qualitatively and quantitatively. Kubota (2020) argues that even though racist ideologies about linguistic and educational practices exist, there is also epistemological racism that privileges white knowledge production as better and 'sacred' epistemologies while subjugating and erasing knowledge production in the global south and other minoritized groups. In a



similar fashion, Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) also adds to legitimizing autoethnographic studies because it helps to “concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experiences” (p. 243).

In the social sciences, there have been contentions on autoethnography being a ‘proper’ form of research (Sparkes, 2000). In opposition to this, I argue that by choosing to represent research in different ways, we give veneration to the self as an important determinant of accountability of individual experiences. A mention of self is not bad after all because it helps to give first-hand accounts of what the self has undergone within a specified time of human and social interaction. Kubota (2020) and Sparkes (2000) also contend that autoethnography is a way of representing our research in a different way which leads to discoveries and new insights into our topic. The benefits and value of autoethnography as a method are numerous; Pavlenko (2002; 2007) mentions that autoethnographic studies are a rich and valuable source of data. For me, it is an unadulterated method of inquiry that brings experiences, motivations, joys, and heuristics that are within to the outside world. Apart from its being a readily accessible data that Mendez (2013) mentions, I also see autoethnographies as a research tool to take power from the hands of certain institutional structures and bodies that are fixed in white ethnocentric norms of representation. Pratt (1991) argues that “autoethnographic text, by which I mean a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” (p. 35) What this means is that, by engaging in this kind of reflexive writing, we are able to represent our unique selves as they are with little or no adulteration of events as against how other people tell the multilingual experiences from an objective stance. As a method of inquiry, it sweeps off colonial hegemonies that surround how minoritized voices are unavoidably ‘othered’. Méndez (2013) states that autoethnographies help others to reflect on their own experiences which they had initially thought of. Sometimes, we need to hear the experiences of others in a particular situation to be able to reflect on our own cultural ways of being. I know that my

experiences and writing practices that will be discussed in this thesis will not capture all experiences of international students in the United States; however, it will serve as illumination to other multilingual writers who come into contact with this study to think about their own literacy development practices across time. Pratt (1991) categorizes autoethnography as “a literate art of the contact zone” (p. 36). As people come into contact with other people in a transnational environment, autoethnographies contribute to our knowledge of who they are, their literacies, and their positionality as legitimate members of a new discourse community.

However, there are several criticisms against autoethnographic studies, and issues of credibility and reliability of the stories and experiences are sometimes questioned. Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) point out that such questions about credibility and factual evidence permeate narrative accounts. Sparkes (2000) also articulates issues of believability and authenticity of autoethnographic studies on the premise of how the narrative that the researcher tells evokes feelings in the reader. If the reader can connect to the story vicariously, they are able to judge the authenticity of the account being shared in the research. Though this argument by Sparkes (2000) is true to some extent, I contend that I am not really concerned about the feelings and emotions of the reader while reading this work because feelings are subjective, temporary, and idiosyncratic; what might evoke a sense of emotionality in me might not evoke a similar feeling in another. Our sense of responding to texts from different ecologies is very subjective. Putting the power of judgment of reflexive studies in the hands of the reader is somewhat inaccurate because the reader is not the experiencer of the events that have culminated into the storied life of the researcher. I understand that some scholars or critics may position narrative forms of inquiry within a fictitious lens—a somewhat created story. For me, there is no point in creating emotional narratives to attract the sympathy of readers. I seek no sympathy in doing that; what I relish most in this study is being able to situate myself in a tangent that will be a self-awakening call for institutions, second language writers and scholars, and monolingual ideologists to be able to

reorient their minds and institutional practices that downplay multilingual writing, needs and experiences. It is a very transparent account of what I have witnessed over the years in the US as a graduate student. Trahar (2009) argues that “narrative inquirers engage in intense and transparent reflection and questioning of their own position, values, beliefs, and cultural background” (p. 8).

As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study, I have engaged in careful thought processes and considerations of my own values and belief systems as a graduate student and a teacher before deciding to put myself out there in this work. Another issue of concern that serves as a limitation or disadvantage of autoethnography is the tendency not to reveal too much of ‘the self’ in the research. Mendez (2013) points out that self-disclosure in autoethnography is problematic because sometimes the researcher would not want to reveal certain inner experiences and thoughts. I must admit that I found myself in these kinds of thoughts, but I am a firm believer in the fact that as an international student and multilingual writer, I want to be unapologetic, unafraid, and unflinchingly bold to verbalize my unique experiences of navigating this academic trajectory.

### **Context of the Study**

This study took place in a midwestern university in the United States. As an international graduate student in the United States, this study engages in critical conversations of multilingual writing using myself as an epistemology through autoethnography to understand my literate practices and experiences of navigating a two-year educational trajectory. I will be looking at my development of writerly voice as a new rhetorical reality as well as shifts in writing ideologies of shuttling two seemingly different educational terrains. This work is also a semester-long study (January-July 2023) and a partial requirement for the award of a Master of Science degree in English.

## **Data Collection**

Data is an essential part of every research, and autoethnography is no exception to that. Data for this study will be personal stories (teacher-student narratives), experiences, and artifacts from my academic writing trajectory, which includes papers written for my master's degree, such as end-of-semester application papers, learning logs/reflective writing logs, course plans, I wrote for the classes I teach as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Department of English at Illinois State University. As established in the previous paragraphs, these storied events and written materials are valuable sources of data as I situate myself in the confines of this autoethnographic study. Based on this, I will draw on my own personal experiences as an Akan Speaker of English to discuss how I have navigated my writing practices from my journey as a student from Ghana through to the US. The goal is to not only present my narratives about these literate activities rather, but I will also offer reflections that are grounded in my own personal experiences as well as put into conversation how this autoethnographic study expands and contributes to scholarship on academic socialization practices of international students in transnational spaces. This data corpus consists of papers from some of the courses from my master's degree and some artifacts that focused on the following areas : (1) written end-of-semester application papers, (2) learning logs/ reflective weekly writing, and (3) low-stake writing assignments. Data for this study are summarized in the table below:

**Table I: Personal data corpus: Graduate school courses and genres**

| Semesters       | Fall 2021   | Spring 2023  | Fall 2022   |  |  |
|-----------------|---|--|---|--|--|
| Courses taken   | <p>ENG401 Teaching Composition</p> <p>ENG401 Introduction to Graduate Studies</p> <p>ENG 401 Teaching Composition</p> <p>ENG401 Introduction to Graduate Studies</p> <p>ENG 440 Studies in English Linguistics</p> <p>Course Plan ENG 101 Fall 2021</p> <p>ENG101 Assignment Sheets</p> | <p>ENG343 Cross-Cultural Issues in TESOL</p> <p>ENG344 TESOL Theoretical Foundation</p> <p>ENG341 Introduction Descriptive Linguistics</p> | <p>ENG346 Assessment and Testing in ESL</p> <p>ENG440 Studies in English Linguistics</p> <p>ENG422 Studies in Shakespeare</p> |  |  |
| Genres produced | <p>Research/Application Papers</p> <p>Reflective Logs</p> <p>Assignment Papers</p>  | <p>Research/Application Papers</p> <p>Reflective Logs</p> <p>Assignment Papers</p>   | <p>Research/Application Papers</p> <p>Reflective Logs</p> <p>Assignment Papers</p>  | <p>Research/Application Papers</p> <p>Reflective Logs</p> <p>Assignment Papers</p> |  |

## **Data Analysis**

The procedures for analyzing the data for this study are important because subjecting data in every research to careful analysis is vital to understanding and providing answers to research questions and contextualizing the theoretical framework of the study appropriately. I will be doing a thematic analysis of the salient themes and patterns in my writing. Thematic analysis is one of the useful ways of analyzing qualitative data that involves studying repetitive patterns within a set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data for this study will be coded for themes that emerge from my writing and the narratives. For instance, because one of my research questions focuses on how I have developed a writerly voice, I will use Hyland's (2008) metadiscoursal analysis of stance and engagement to look at my discursive strategies of voice and show evidence for each marker of voice from my graduate school papers. An important subject of discussion is developing a writerly voice in my writing.

I will show how this embodied voice has helped me develop an assertive stance in my own writing. In terms of the stories, they will also be thematized based on the set of experiences they capture. An important thing to note is that I am not just going to narrate stories as though I am presenting literary/fictitious material, but every single experience or narrative I share will be analyzed in relation to how the narrative teases out critical issues on multilingual/transnational /L2 writing.

Ellis & Bochner (2000) mention that "If you are a storyteller rather than a story analyst, then your goal becomes therapeutic rather than analytic" (p. 745). Similarly, Pavlenko (2007) posits that having the data in autoethnography and not knowing what to do with them is problematic and suggests that thematic analysis is one of common ways of analyzing and categorizing data for this kind of study. I do not want to be a 'therapist' in this work that will be of less pedagogical value to the audience and myself as a teacher. As part of understanding my method of inquiry better and knowing how to implement it usefully in this thesis, I learned a few things from Poulous (2021), who gives a simplified account of how to do autoethnography in his recently published book.

Poulous (2021) mentions that in doing autoethnography, the researcher must carefully examine their sense data which involves paying attention to what I feel, smell, and hear as I take my mind back to these experiences I have had while doing this graduate school journey. I have been more attuned to sending my mind back to moments when some of these events occurred and how I felt during those times. As Poulous (2021) mentioned that the embodied nature of autoethnographic work, revisiting the written artifacts I produced as a graduate student helped me feel the experiences again. Poulous (2001) calls the process of going back to particular moments in time “mining memories” (p. 27). Memory is a fundamental material in storying. He mentions that “autoethnographers often examine memory as a primary data set” (Poulous, 2021, p. 27). This kind of retrospective inquiry of the self has been useful in carefully remembering and recognizing past experiences that will be useful for this study. I will utilize this memory-mining technique in the areas where I share narratives of my graduate school experiences.

Again, he mentions that active writing is a good way to make sense of certain human experiences. I have benefited from this point he makes because ever since I decided to do this kind of thesis, I think about my study every single day where I get new thoughts. The thing about thoughts is that they are fleeting; they come and go. Consequently, I have engaged in active writing to briefly put some of these thoughts on my sticker notes that will help guide me when I zoom into the actual work in Chapter 4.

### **Positionality**

As a multilingual Ghanaian MA student studying Applied linguistics in a midwestern university in the US, this study also has some bearing on my academic life as a prospective doctoral student in a new US university. A study of my biliteracy writing practices will give me a sense of how I would navigate my Ghanaian and US teacher identities as well as a rhetorical awareness of strategies of writing at an advanced level of study. The comprehensible insights from analyzing my teacher-practitioner

experiences will be of great value in my eventual socialization in a similar American academic discourse community. In making my positionality clear and visible, I also want to note how my autoethnography differs from other autoethnographic works by some Applied Linguists because autoethnography is taken up and used by many Applied Linguists in a myriad of contexts. This means that scholars in the field of Applied Linguistics use ethnographies to share different narratives and stories. For instance, Pavlenko (2002; 2007) talks about the value of autoethnographic data as a growing method of inquiry in the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics and also emphasizes how to analyze autoethnographic data, Canagarajah (2019) in his transnational autobiographies utilizes autoethnography to share narratives of himself and his students navigating new transnational educational environment emphasizing code meshing orientations and negotiation strategies of multilingual writers, Sanchez-Martin & Seloni (2019) use collaborative autoethnography to share their identities as feminist academics in dissertation mentoring as a gendered activity. However, my autoethnographic study is a ‘dual approach’—it utilizes both evidentiality (corpus from my graduate school and stories/anecdotes/personal experiences). Some of the narratives/stories are grounded in my experiences of navigating two cultural spaces of education (Ghana and the US). I discuss them in relation to how they tease out critical issues in multilingual writing. For instance, my discussion of writerly voice and identity as two different themes utilizes evidence from my graduate school papers, but my evolving conceptual knowledge of genres in the US is a storied one.

My dual approach of using both stories and evidence from graduate school papers is premised on my own understanding of autoethnography as a method that can utilize both evidentiality and stories as beneficial epistemologies for understanding one’s nuanced literate practices. Lastly, another keen thing I want to emphasize is that some of the analyses in the next chapter are more of my reactions to the events that happened and not necessarily the motivations behind those occurrences by those subjects involved. This is because I do not have access to their minds, and it would be wrong



and inaccurate to fully assume that some of the findings are actually the real intended meanings and motivations behind those events.

### **Conclusion**

In the next chapter, I discuss and analyze my writing stories, experiences, and writing practices in navigating my graduate school trajectory in the United States. The experiences and narratives (student and teacher narratives) I share sums up the practices and events that have culminated in writing this study. The next chapter is not only meant to present my narratives about these literate activities and practices; rather, I will offer reflections and also put into conversation how this autoethnographic study expands and contributes to scholarship on academic socialization practices of international students in transnational spaces.

## CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### **Introduction**

As noted in Chapter 3, this autoethnographic study utilizes stories and evidentiality (corpus from my graduate school papers) as self-reflective epistemologies to understand my literate practices in a US academic discourse community. In this chapter, I discuss and analyze my stories and experiences around academic writing practices in navigating graduate school's academic requirements and expectations in the context of United States higher education. Contributing to the literature on the academic socialization of transnational graduate students in the US (e.g., Duff, 2003; Seloni, 2012, 2014; Zappa-Hollman, 2007), this chapter presents an autoethnographic account of literate activities, linguistic and social adjustment practices of graduate school focusing on my lived experiences as a Ghanaian student pursuing an MS degree in the U.S.

This chapter is divided into three sections (I-III). Section I: Personal data begins with an overview of languages in Ghana and my formative relationship with the English language and literacy, my academic literacy socialization practices, and some key encounters with racism in the US. In section II: writing identity, I discuss my writing identity, which encompasses how I developed a writerly voice and how I used pidgin as a linguistic repertoire in composing texts for graduate school in the US. This chapter ends with a critical examination of shifts in writing pedagogy (section III) as an international graduate student from Ghana in a new academic discourse community. Because of the plentiful examples I have from my graduate school papers, I provide an appendix at the end of this work that gives more examples of voice markers in my writing.

To reiterate, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

4. How do I develop a writerly voice in academic writing?

5. What are some of the challenges and affordances I meet as I engage in writing for graduate school as an Akan speaker of English?

6. What are some of the shifts in my writing pedagogy as a graduate student in the US?

### **(Section I) Personal Data**

In this section, I discuss my formative literacies with English and academic literacy socialization practices in the US, which encompasses my linguistic and social adjustments in the US.

#### **(a) My Language Learning Trajectory: Contours of My Literacy Development**

As a student-teacher who is fascinated by people's embodied experiences and literacy development, I have come to accept and value the power of stories in life and how these stories shape literacy and cultural ways of knowing. In emphasizing the crucial role of narratives in people's lives, Clandinin (2006) mentions that "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 51). To better help situate the work in the context of my cultural foundations and my graduate school experience, it is expedient to start this storied trajectory with my formative language route and educational experiences from Ghana. This encompasses knowing who I am, my language and cultural pathways, and how I found myself in English as an academic discipline.

I am a member of the Ghanaian Akan linguistic group. Ghana is a multilingual society with about 80 different languages spoken across the sixteen regions. Akan is a Niger-Congo Kwa language spoken by many natives and non-natives in Ghana. Ghana's most extensively used language is Akan.. Ghana has eighty (80) different languages spoken across the sixteen regions of Ghana. Some of these Ghanaian languages are Akan (Akuapem, Fante, and Akyem), Ewe Nzema, Ga, Dagaare, Kasem, Dagbani, and Gonja. With a population of over thirty-six million people, where the majority of the populace speaks Akan, Akan has become a de facto language that is used as a medium of communication in schools and political settings. From my experiences as a student from Ghana, Akan

has received lots of criticism on any idea of its being used as a medium of instruction in schools since Ghana is a multilingual society. I speak the Akuapem dialect of Akan as my L1 and consequently learned English as my L2 in school and at home. Ghana uses English as its official language of instruction in schools by dint of our colonial history with British imperial rule. English is a core subject in the Ghanaian school curriculum where everyone needs a pass to get through to the next academic ladder. In spaces outside the classroom, such as churches and social gatherings with friends whose parents had strong English adherence policies, I sought clarification requests where there is an information gap or communication breakdown and paid keen attention to the people interacted with, I also benefited keenly from the newscasters I watched on TV3 and Radio Gold (two of my favorite TV and radio stations in Ghana). I would randomly rehearse some of the jingles for adverts and voiceovers that some of these presenters did. In Ghana, English is regarded as a valuable language for communication and education since many Ghanaians value and respect those who speak it.

In my formative years, my parents always emphasized the important role of education because they did not have the opportunity to advance their level of education to the altitude they wanted. My Auntie, whom I referred to as my mother in some narratives I shared earlier in one of my courses in graduate school, also emphasized that education will be the key to unlocking so many opportunities for myself and my two brothers. She had a considerable tertiary level of education and had the utmost belief that I am a smart kid and needed all the support to climb every facet of my life to the top. Being the first son of my parents, I had an onerous task to take my academics seriously because, within the Akan landscape, firstborns are idealized as people who must set paths straight for their younger siblings to follow. My father was very stern and strict regarding my learning of the English language earlier than later, and it became something that he and my mother would constantly talk about. Though they believed that I could still learn English later through formal instruction, they made sure that I had private hours of reading lots of English textbooks, and stories and doing lots of

writing in a book called “My first copy book”. I remember that on vacations, while many kids in the neighborhood played in the street, my mother always wanted me to enroll in ‘extra classes’ in English—a term that is popularly used in Ghana to denote taking classes with a professional teacher outside school. During vacations, I could not go out until I had completed assignments and reading tasks. I would constantly fume over that as I saw other kids joyfully play soccer in my neighborhood.

Between the age of six and fifteen, I had already learned how to read some short African stories and novels written in English. In my free time, I remember reading *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, which was a popular African and world novel at that time; I read Professor Kofi Awoonor’s poems (*The Weaver Bird*, *The Cathedral*), Ama Ata Aidoo’s short stories that were written in 1997. Though the content of these stories and poems was dense sometimes due to some metaphoric meanings that the texts had, I still read them with a grin. Writing was also introduced to me at the same age, my father would always make me write stories about myself, my school, and my community, and that was really a priceless moment for me because it helped me develop a massive taste for writing at that young age. I remember how the back of my class notebooks would have some meaningless writings, which attracted the attention of some of my classmates in my middle school years.

My experience with the English language started very early in life, I used to watch and listen to a program called “Mind Your Language,” which was aired on Ghana Television (GTV), where Educated Ghanaian English was corrected, and new vocabulary was introduced. This program really had an impact on my speaking and listening skills. At this age, I loved to brag about this accomplishment and would constantly use the new vocabulary I had gotten from the program in class. In my Junior High School days, my teachers would always tell me that I had a good voice for radio since I would always be selected to read in class during English reading comprehension hours. On entering High School, I knew very well that I wanted to do something that would usher me into the journalism/communication field. A part of me was also drawn to teaching, but I had not quite been

in tune with it. In most cases, when teachers would have staff meetings, I was assigned to lead my class to read or do a writing activity, but I had not fully come to terms with the thought of being a teacher then. I always had this thought that teachers earned meager salaries and always saw them in the news embarking on strike actions for increments in salaries. Teaching became unattractive to me at that point; however, on entering Senior High School, I knew full well that I wanted to do something with literature and English, so I took General Arts and had literature in English as one of my electives. Literature became a safe haven for me because I was always overly excited to see my literature teacher come to class. Early days of my Senior High School education, my teachers and my classmates discovered that I have a baritone voice that was good for reading. I would always receive compliments from people about my ‘heavy voice,’ which made me mortified and happy concurrently. I ultimately became the ‘class reader’ in all the subjects I took, especially literature. I must admit that it was one of the most surreal moments in my academic life that I really enjoyed. My voice always commanded silence in the class anytime I read, and I enjoyed the respect that came with it.

### **(b) Reading Influences: Joys of My Teenage**

I found so much joy in African literature, especially poems and novels that interrogated issues of nationalism, the repercussions of colonialism, and the post-independence African societal setup. I read *A Woman in Her Prime* by Asare Konadu, *Grief Child* by Lawrence Darmani, and the works of Ama Ata Aidoo; the poems included *Ambassadors of Poverty* by P.O.C Umeh and *Abiku* by J.P Clark, which eventually became my nickname in High School. I always got straight A’s on everything I turned in for English literature. Around this time, I had started to internalize the idea of being a professor in the future, and I would randomly write at the back of my notebooks ‘Gabriel Opare, B. A (Hons) Political Science, MPhil, Ph.D. (Professor at the University of Ghana)’”. Political Science? As ludicrous as it sounds, I never considered studying English as a major at the University. Because of the reading influences that I mentioned earlier, they imbued in me concepts of nationalism and postcolonialism which I was

curious to explore; as such, I envisaged that a bachelor's degree in political science should suffice. At this time, I knew very well that I wanted to be a professor but not a professor of English.

My father had also already thought that being a teacher would be the best choice for me because he thought that I would not have to suffer to get a job since the government needs many teachers to teach. He suggested going to a teachers' training college, which gives you a diploma in basic education after three years. I objected to it because If I wanted to teach, I wanted a straight-up bachelor's degree, not a three-year diploma.

### **(c) My Academic Literacy Socialization Practices: Becoming Part of a New Discourse Community**

One of the things I considered and thought about prior to applying to schools in the United States was how it would be seemingly difficult to leave my family, friends, and loved ones in my church and community to come abroad alone by myself. Having spent all my life living with my parents, it was hard for me, though excited, to come to terms with my new reality that I would spend two years alone in a distant land. Friends and acquaintances told me how lonely it could sometimes be in places like the United States, where people seldom have time for visits and building friendships because everyone is focused on working to get money. I remember the sad countenance I had as I said goodbyes to my family at the Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana. It was a paradoxical situation because I was both excited and sad about this two-year graduate school journey. The happy part was getting American education which will help me secure better job opportunities as well as veneration from my Ghanaian society as a scholar who has traveled overseas. The sad aspect constituted how I would fare all by myself without my mother's sumptuous meals and other activities like being in the choir, which I love. Although these mixed feelings were incessantly coming into my mind, there was a brighter side, my university had quite a large number of Ghanaian students

compared to other universities in the Midwest. That was an absolute sigh of relief seeing my Ghanaian people around.

However, as an English major, I did not know how I would fare in my new classes because it was a new academic environment that I had been socialized into. The first two months were overwhelming; I did not understand many concepts that were being taught in my classes, and I felt lonely and distant from a seemingly new academic culture. There were days when I cried because I was not getting my academic work on track, and I constantly thought of the repercussions that would have on my scholarship. Again, the fact that my first semester was done in the middle of a global pandemic was seemingly overwhelming. It was not just the newness of the academic context, but also the fact that I needed to understand new concepts and interactional style of learning virtually stirred up feelings of paranoia where I thought that I might fail in this new educational escapade if I do not adapt quickly. Coursework, navigating digital literacies, and finding footing in my new discourse community had inundated me so much that I decided to return to Ghana. My mother counseled that I should remain resolute and courageous to face my new realities; she also offered words of hope and prayers to keep me strengthened. I realized that I needed help from people in my academic community to succeed. In my undergraduate days, I had a resourceful study group where we discussed course concepts and helped each other with coursework and projects. It was one of the formidable pillars that helped me successfully graduate with honors in my college days. According to Canagarajah (2002), multilingual students are already part of various communities of practice in international settings. Canagarajah's (2002) arguments highlight how certain keen associations, bonds, and affective factors can be lost when multilingual students transit to new academic and cultural spaces of practice. His arguments further elucidate the stress and emotions of shuttling a new discourse community after having lived in a particular discourse community for a long period of time. To corroborate this, Canagarajah (2002) further states that "holding



membership in two different communities may not be easy—especially if they have a history of antagonistic relations” (p. 31). For many international students like me, that membership I had back home in Ghana was seemingly lost; some of my white course mates were not friendly, which somewhat made me feel unwelcome. Bonds and associations have the tendency to keep multilingual students sane, making them feel at home in a new environment. In the absence of such bonds, international students might feel alienated and estranged since memberships and healthy academic relationships in their new discourse communities will somewhat bring them close to the relationships they had in their former places of habitation. Also, I had thought of the United States as an individualistic society, and I had not quite envisioned that I would find such networks.

Several scholars and practitioners in the field of Applied Linguistics mentioned that academic socialization for international students studying in US higher education doesn't only take place in institutional spaces. In her work, Seloni (2012) extensively explores the academic socialization practices of six multilingual doctoral students studying in US graduate programs, where she reveals that the academic socialization practices of multilingual students are nuanced and multilayered. Nonnative English-speaking graduate students dwell on outside collaborative networks to navigate not just how to 'do graduate school' but how various interactive dialogues usher them into becoming legitimate members of their disciplinary orientations in new discourse communities. Seloni (2012) explicates initial contact frames as “interactive learning spaces in which newcomers are engaged in the basic conventions about the sources of knowledge and how to access them as they begin to construct a situated understanding of the issues in their fields of study” (p. 51). The complexities and expectations of navigating my graduate threshold made me aware of how I will need the support of other members who will be supportive in helping me become a literate member of this new academic discourse community. These initial contact frames for me took place in the form of establishing relationships with fellow Ghanaian students in my program. We had text exchanges and a couple of

phone calls before coming to the US. These two literate members of my new discourse community became an academic blessing. They had spent a significant number of years in the program, and as such, I found confidence in telling them about my academic needs and challenges. They were very supportive anytime I sent him some of my papers to share his feedback and comments. In the fall of 2021, when I could not get a hold of concepts in the ENG 402 Teaching Composition class, which is one of the first courses that graduate writing instructors need to take. The ENG 402 course is a course that provides the necessary pedagogical foundations of writing as a complex activity from a sociocultural perspective contacted Eric to look at the grassroots article, which is an article every graduate student enrolled in the Masters' or Ph.D. in English in the department is required to write after taking the ENG 402 class in their first semester. They both offered instructive feedback on how I could position the paper to capture keen concepts in the writing program. When I complained about how terrible I felt as a student in my academics, they would offer words of hope and encouragement for me to stay strong and fight a good fight. Most times, they would randomly check up on me to find out how I am doing in the semester. They edited the assignments and papers I submitted at the end of the semester. Even though one of them was in the literary and cultural studies cohort, he had in-depth knowledge of issues centered on applied linguistics. They both had absolute dexterity with writing; anytime we had phone conversations, they offered good writing tips that eventually helped me to develop good writing skills. Most importantly, they shared in my difficulties since they had similar experiences being socialized in a new academic environment. I did not know much about the expectations of my major and how professors would intuitively receive my papers, but they offered good tips of on what to expect. Seloni (2012) argues that “the newcomers are often seen as constantly juggling expectations of the disciplines, experiencing a lack of linguistic and cultural capital, and making accommodations for the new environments in which they are being immersed” (p 49). Seloni’s (2012) argument further adds that students’ use of various resources and academic spaces to succeed

in their new academic adventures foregrounds the importance of interactive dialogues as a mediational tool in one's academic literacy socialization, which also diffuses the deficit-oriented views of academic literacy socialization as a one-way street; rather it is collaborative and engaging.

The thought of not doing well in my discipline and the demands of my area of specialty birthed streams of anxieties that made me feel uncomfortable in my new academic environment. Another important contact that helped me to feel situated and well-positioned in my classes was class discussion forums and classmates' responses to courses. In some cases, I did not understand what professors taught; I inferred from what my mates discussed or reactions to class readings to better understanding certain concepts. I also benefited from oral presentations of projects in class. Most of my courses gave students opportunities to present papers on various topics orally. I feared standing in front of my colleagues to present my ideas even though I had done quite a number of these presentations in my undergraduate days. My fears were grounded in how professors and course mates may negatively receive my thoughts and ideas. The brighter side was that professors and course mates received my ideas in supportive ways. My ideas were shaped well by professors, and I got support and encouragement from my mates whenever I did a presentation. Emphasizing the pivotal role of academic presentation in the socialization of non-native English speakers into their new environment, Zappa-Hollaman (2007) states that professors and peers in native English-speaking environments do not judge the oral academic proficiencies of multilingual students; rather, they give them the needed scaffold and encouragement to succeed in navigating their academics. For instance, one of the participants from China expressed how it was seemingly difficult to present himself as smart and intelligent in front of his course mates and professors who were native English speakers. This instance in her work shows how some international students constantly juggle issues of confidence, expressiveness, and anxiety in new environments where they feel unqualified to participate and engage in academic activities. Zappa-Hollman (2007) further concludes that students' L2 discourse

socialization is seen as a complex process by researchers and teachers after looking at the presentation difficulties and coping mechanisms used by the participating students in Western Canada. Zappa-Hollman (2007) argues that a lack of vocabulary, unclear pronunciation, and sociocultural knowledge of their transnational environment may affect the academic presentations of NNES students, but I believe that should not derail multilingual students from making contributions in their classrooms. Academic learning is a complexly reciprocal activity. These acts of my initial academic socialization practice foreground the importance of willingness for new international students to seek support in their new discourse communities.

Most international students may be afraid and uncomfortable in seeking academic support from their mates because of the intellectual marginalization and fears of unacceptance they may face. Such fears may prevent most students from getting well situated in their respective disciplines because I strongly believe that older members of discourse communities constitute legitimate sources of knowledge and are willing to extend helping hands to mentor and coach novice members of a discourse community to reach a formidable threshold in their areas of study. Having been socialized into American culture through my graduate school journey, I also realized that academic socialization practices do not only constitute in-school networks and engagements; rather, it encompasses outside collaborative shelters and engagements that help new members of a discourse community to thrive. An important out-of-school network in my graduate school trajectory is finding a Ghanaian Pentecostal church in Normal, Illinois, with many Ghanaian students. It has been one of the formidable spaces that have improved my mental health through the religious fellowship the church offers, as well as the sense of belonging it gave me. As a Christian who does not play with my spiritual life, finding a Ghanaian church in a new environment made me feel a little close to home; since most of us in the church are Ghanaian students, we affectionately share in each other's struggles and plights through casual conversations after church service. Both Seloni (2012) and Zappa-Hollman (2007)

emphasize that academic socialization is a communal activity where there are lots of affective factors at play. The random conversations and engagements with my Ghanaian folks in the church made me realize how building communities in a newly socialized environment helps to improve one's literate practices in a new discourse community. These engagements were absolute joys, and Pratt (1991) opines that "along with rage, incomprehension, and pain, there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom-the joys of the contact zone" (p. 39).

Being part of this Ghanaian community in the US, I also realized that the academic socialization practices of international students might take different forms of semiotic resources that help them to maneuver their literate practices. One such semiotic resource in my graduate school trajectory is chorale music. There was no moment I read or wrote a paper without chorale music playing in the background. I listened to my all-time favorite choir, the Harmonious Chorale Ghana, an internationally renowned chorale group in Ghana. Their sublime voices and prodigious performances always sent me to a place of placidity when composing texts for graduate school. Canagarajah (2019) argues that "multilingual writers construct expressive mode that mixes languages and other semiotic resources to answer their identity concerns" (p. 55). In his work, he specifically discusses the role of diverse languages and literate practices of some of his multilingual students from Korea, and China, among others, who have distinct and interesting writing histories and trajectories. For instance, one of his student's fondness for Chinese fairy tales and mythologies became a writing style he found solace in. He used lots of metaphorical descriptions in his writing. As an ardent chorister who has been singing in the Methodist Church, Ghana for a decade, I found utmost tranquility in listening to the Harmonious Chorale Ghana, which gave me strength in moments of disquietude and perplexity in my academic trajectory. The literate practices of international students are grafted with expressive semiotic tools that help them to connect to their homes and cultures in transnational spaces.

The second phase of my academic socialization takes place in institutional academic spaces. In the literature on academic socialization, institutional academic spaces refer to “interactive formal spaces in which structural learning and socialization occur within multiple contexts and among multiple actors” (Seloni, 2012, p. 53). In her study, examples of such institutional academic spaces include the utilization of the writing center, the classrooms the participants inhabited as well as the library. For me, as an international graduate student, Cohort meetings constitute one of the institutional spaces that helped me to thrive in my teaching and learning of writing at Illinois State University. These cohort meetings were held in spring 2022 and Fall 2022. The meetings were mandatory as part of my graduate assistantship and are intended to support instructors, develop a sense of community within the cohort, and offer space to learn new pedagogies of writing as well as offer every graduate course instructor an opportunity to reflect on their teaching as well as develop areas that need improvement and learning from other instructors and writing program members. In these cohort meetings, I instructively learned how various writing teachers designed writing projects in their classes, including generating ideas for culturally responsive and equitable assessments. I also benefited from instructor-consultant meetings that help new graduate students in the English department to be well-situated to teach writing. In these meetings, I had a communication plan with an experienced instructor whom I had been assigned to. Through series of course plan design feedbacks, classroom ethnographic observations, and biweekly meetings, I learned a lot about how to become a better writing teacher. The instructor-mentor relationship also helped me to understand better some sociocultural approaches to teaching writing that utilizes people’s antecedent knowledge of language and writing as epistemologies for researching others’ writing practices and unpacking the nuances of producing texts across multiple genres and multimodalities. My sense of being mentored or apprenticed helped me to relate to discourses about writing. Belcher (1994) emphasizes that apprenticeship roles have been downplayed, considering how efficacious apprenticeship and

mentorship scaffold new/novice members in an academic community with the needed materials to be successful in their academic trajectory.

My academic socialization practices index how institutional support is crucial in helping international students to navigate their literate activities properly. One of my research questions interrogates the resources and spaces available for international students to enact their biliterate practices in US graduate programs. This question seeks to address and echo institutional readiness to provide arduous help to international students to thrive in their new educational environment. Mahalingappa et. al (2021) emphasize institutional and faculty readiness to support linguistically diverse students as an essential caveat in helping multilingual students to thrive in their discourse communities. The question now hinges on the kind of support that will accommodate the needs of international students in new spaces. On accentuating the critical role international students play in US institutions, Matsuda (2006) indicates that international students bring foreign capital and enhance the institutional reputation of US institutions because of the diversity they bring to those institutions; therefore, I believe there should be an utmost concern for the needs of international students in US institutions. How can the duty of the International Scholar Services in US graduate programs go beyond 'paperwork' (issuance of I-20 etc.) to proper orientation of new international students in their new academic communities? Due to anxieties about being socialized into a new academic community, some international students will not know that there are institutional spaces (counseling services, cohort meetings, international student associations) they can utilize to be successful in the US classroom. The International student services in US schools should constantly conscientize, and orient international students to fully engage with resources and institutional spaces within their new academic community. Another important question is how much linguistic and cultural knowledge professors and teachers have of international students to help them succeed in their academics.

My academic socialization practices show that readiness to support international students constitutes mentorships, cohort meetings designing culturally responsive pedagogies, and creating safe spaces for international students to feel comfortable to ask the necessary questions that will help them thrive in both school and out-of-school contexts. Mahalingappa et. al (2021) found that most teachers/professors had little or no knowledge of linguistically responsive instruction, which I believe is a bummer considering the heterogenous nature of most US classrooms. Teachers' lack of awareness of the needs of linguistically diverse students reinforces what Matsuda (2006) terms "linguistic homogeneity", which assumes that "composition students are native speakers of a privileged variety of English" (p. 638). US-centric ideas that do not see the US classroom as a site of multiple cultures and languages need to be revised to help multilingual students succeed. Some international students come into US graduate programs with little or no knowledge of writing instruction in the US context, and in some cases, they do not get the support to transition as new writing teachers in the US. Also, from my graduate school experience, I have seen that most international students become reticent in challenging entrenched assumptions of their linguistic identities because they lack the cultural ammunition to dismantle systems that refuse to account for the unique resources, they bring to US classrooms. A solution that worked for me as a graduate student was fearlessness; International students must also be unapologetic and fearless in seeking support services from peers, professors, and other older members of their new discourse communities. The superhero idea of 'doing' the graduate school journey all by ourselves is seemingly impossible because seeking support is the natural order of human interactional systems. Seloni (2012) mentions that academic socialization practices are dialogic and situational. Academic literacy socialization as situational and dialogic, as asserted by Seloni (2012), means that newcomers should engage in healthy academic conversations with senior members through email exchanges out of class talks which grounds newcomers in conventions of their disciplines as well as access to various academic spaces (library, cohorts, counseling services) in times



of need. As international students, we need various collaborative networks, dialogues, and coaching to be better situated in our new academic discourse communities. Similarly, Belcher (1994) argues that mentorship and support are essential for success in graduate school. For instance, one of the participants of her study, an Applied Mathematics doctoral candidate from China, did not like the multiple draft processes of dissertation writing. His dissertation advisor had to coach him that writing multiple drafts of a dissertation chapter is part of understanding the academic writing process as well as a way to ensure that the reviews of the work are properly done. In regard to expert and novice relationships in academic literacy socialization, Lee & Bucholtz (2015) indicate that a core aspect of language socialization is how it positions some members of discourse communities as experts and others as novices. These power configurations are structures within academic institutions that international students must know of and utilize. Asking for help from people who are already well-positioned in our new academic environment is not a sign of weakness; instead, it is a shrewd acknowledgment of expert and novice holders of knowledge in our communities of practice. There should also be group learning activities in the US because my graduate school experience has taught me that American society is very individualistic; Maringe and Jenkins (2015) mention that in other eastern countries, there is an emphasis on group learning as against individual instructional methods in many western countries. In addressing the needs of international students, Schneider (2018) mentions that the monolithic institutional categorization of international students is problematic (ESL, EAL) because international students have different educational histories. In his study, he problematizes these categories because not all international students are 'beginners' because many international students have had considerable secondary school education. Therefore, different multilingual students have different linguistic needs, which makes monolithic categorizations unhealthy. Our educational histories as international students are different; therefore, professors and institutional heads in US graduate programs must have enough knowledge of international students

to avoid unnecessary characterization of internationals which will help provide the needed language and academic support.

#### **( d) Encounters with Linguistic Racism: Moments of Mild Irritations**

Coming to United States to pursue a graduate degree was an absolutely surreal and life-changing experience, particularly the thought that I was going to receive a US education which was going to give me different perspectives about research in my chosen area of study. I was also elated to know more about other cultures and communities since the United States is known to be a bastion of cultural diversity in the world. Before coming to the US, I had heard stories of institutional racism and biases that had taken over the sociolinguistic landscape of many parts of the United States, most especially people of color. Though I was privy to conversations about racism through traditional and social media, I never conceived that I would be at the mercy of racism at some point in my life.

On one of my walks to campus, I met a young man who heard me speak with a Ghanaian student I met. After the conversation, he queried, “Where are you from? I presume you are an African, but you speak English so well than a typical African, and your accent is nicer than the ones I know”. The sudden spurt of perspiration and irritation I felt after his question was quite intense. I could not answer the question immediately because I wanted my thoughts and nerves to simmer before I retort. I come from a country where respect for the elderly is a cherished and entrenched virtue in every home; since it had just been a few weeks of coming to America, I knew nothing about how Americans treat respect of older people. My Akan traditions of politeness and respect came in handy as I ‘respectfully’ but cunningly retorted why he would ask me such a question. He told me some of the Africans he had encountered spoke bad English and were bad at communication and that he had not quite anticipated that an African who had just come to the United States would be able to speak “their language”. His sense of ownership of the English Language stoked anger in me, but I remained

resolute in being kind with my words. I did not want to be in a ‘defense’ position to explain myself for someone else’s racial-linguistic bigotry, so I told him I have been speaking and writing English from kindergarten because Ghana uses English as an official language of instruction at all levels of education. Additionally, I told him I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and had come to the US to study for a master’s in English. I saw in his eyes a grand sense of stupefaction after I divulged this to him. He had not come to terms with the idea that an African could speak English the way I did, which resultantly led him to internalize that most Africans spoke bad English. Widdowson (1994) asks an intriguing question on the ownership of English; he questions, “we are teaching English, and the general assumption is that our purpose is to develop in students a proficiency which approximates as closely as possible to that of native speakers. But who are these native speakers?” (p. 377). The question he asks blazes the trail on the preponderant nature of English ownership idealisms in our contemporary world, where English is being used creatively by different territorial confines to carry out their experiences. Achebe (1965), as a Nigerian writer, believed in using the English language to carry our African identity (colonization, slavery, and imperialism). Ownership of English then becomes problematic since its appropriation in various cultural and regional setups is marked differently by accents and the historical antecedents of that particular group of English speakers. Overemphasizing native speaker proficiencies in a classroom or world where English has become malleable in its usage is a futile adventure that gatekeeps emerging varieties of English as well as denounces peoples’ experiences from the English they speak. Widdowson (1994) further argues that English is not an ‘item’ to be leased out to others; it is plurally owned. The English language is “a matter of considerable pride and satisfaction for native speakers of English that their language is an international means of communication.” (Widdowson 1994, p. 385) The Native Speaker-Non-Native Speaker chasm, and the standard language ideologies are perpetuated by some white supremacists to essentialize other cultures who equally speak English. and 344).

Having learned a lot about how the English language has been weaponized to create dichotomies between legitimate and illegitimate users, I have now become reflective of this encounter with racist ideologies about language usage because I believe that stories or reflexive studies should connect to broader social contexts. Stories are good sources of epistemology that intricately connect individual stories to tease out broader sociopolitical/linguistic issues. An important thing I want to emphasize is that some of the reflections in this chapter are more of my reactions to the events that happened and not necessarily the motivations behind those occurrences by those subjects involved. This is because I do not have access to their minds, and it would be wrong and inaccurate to fully assume that some of the findings/reflections are actually the real intended meanings and motivations behind those events. Standard English ideology, according to Lippi-Green (2000), is an imaginary and mythical assumption about English that is used in schools, and it is considered the norm under which all other varieties must conform. As Lippi-Green puts it, “the most straightforward and unapologetically ideological definitions of standard language come from those who make a living protecting it from change” (Lippi-Green, 2000, p. 56). This is exactly what I thought about and felt when the stranger’s sense of ownership of the English came up in the conversation. Even though the encounter made me utterly irritable, I realized that his views constituted what Chimamanda Adichie terms as a single story. He had internalized a singular view of how Africans use English badly because of their accents and his relative encounters with some Africans. What he failed to realize is that within the American sociolinguistic landscape, there are sociolects and idiolects that are seemingly different varieties of American English. The contrast in the statement “I presume you are African” is an example of the misassumption about normativized English which explicates that perfect English speaking is associated with US English speakers but not “nonnatives”. Lippi-Green (2000) mentions that “people are so comfortable with the idea of standard language so much so that they have no trouble describing and defining it” (p. 53). This is a racio-linguistic ideology that arrogates power to

people within privileged domains to judge and make pronouncements on English as good or bad. Such assumptions constitute a limited view of English language usage considering the heterogeneous nature of multiliterate communication. Canagarajah (2015) opines that native speaker assumptions about the use of the English language are “deficient identification when we consider that learners of English are bringing with them proficiencies in other languages” ( p. 417). Similarly, Maringe and Jenkins (2015) and Lippi-Green (2000) also emphasize that the idea of good English is an abstraction and inconsistent considering the different versions of English that exist in the world. Stigmatization constitutes one of the realizations of racism in a discourse community. Maringe and Jenkins (2015) posit that stigmatization refers to “situations where people feel that they are prejudged (often in a negative way) about their identities and cultural backgrounds in relation to indigenous cultural groups” (p. 612). The effects of such racist ideologies about language usage can be detrimental to the academic life of people who are socialized into new environments, such as international students. Though this stranger subtly took me out of the racial equation, thoughts about this encounter in the early days of my graduate school journey made me question whether Africans are in a legitimate position to use the English language. Flores & Rosa (2015) concludes that:

a raciolinguistic perspective seeks to understand how the white gaze is attached both to a speaking subject who engages in the idealized linguistic practices of whiteness and to a listening subject who hears and interprets the linguistic practices of language-minoritized populations as deviant based on their racial positioning in society as opposed to any objective characteristics of their language use.(p. 151)

This positionality by Flores & Rosa (2015) accurately defines how I felt after this racial encounter. I felt that other English varieties that are not considered within the realms of standard English are being judged and described by some whites who have little or no ideas of the cultural and

historical foundations of the emergence of the supposed linguistic practices of the minority groups. The Englishes considered as ‘other’ are constantly policed within their own ‘standard’ lens, which does not represent the linguistic practices of the minority group under such an inconclusive gaze. It is an inconclusive gaze because it only leads to singular purviews of the linguistic characteristics of these supposed minority language groups.

In Fall 2021, I took courses in Introduction to Graduate S Study, Teaching Composition, as well as Studies in English Linguistics. My class was predominantly white, with two Africans. Classroom engagements and participation became something I dreaded because, after the encounter, I internalized that inasmuch as I had received a compliment about being a ‘good African speaker of English’, I quite did not know how other white speakers would judge my English if I spoke in class, knowing that what sounds good to one person may sound bad to another. The encounter consequentially stifled my participation in classroom discourse because I was still coiled up in feelings of whether I was legitimate enough to use English and how my Akan rhetorical traditions may impact my contributions in class. Eventually, what I feared happened—when I made my first contribution in class, I saw a ‘billion’ eyes staring in my direction, and the sudden hush of voices in the class, as I spoke, made me sweat profusely. In my mind, I wanted to know what they were thinking: did they hear me? Was my accent bad for their ears? I needed answers to these questions within that interim. Their grimace, in my mind, may have indexed the ‘we have not heard this accent before syndrome’. The class continued, but I was completely lost in an identity crisis in the rest of the classes that I had in my first semester. Stigmatization can have students’ identities eroded (Maringe & Jenkins 2015). I was torn between learning an American accent to be able to fit in well classroom discussions and sticking to my Ghanaian ways of speaking English. I started watching American shows such as CNN news, the “Daily Show” hosted by Trevor Noah, and America’s Got Talent just to learn American accents to be able to fit well in the classroom. I started speaking some American accents with friends,

but I would unconsciously switch to my Ghanaian accent in class engagements. This was a difficult season battling with an identity crisis just to fit in. I realized after the first semester that I was burdening myself with something I am not and will never be. There were moments where people would seek extra cues of clarification when I spoke because they did probably understand my accent. There were times in and outside school when people would blatantly tell me, 'I did not hear you well; can you speak slowly?' In my mind, they probably thought my accent was not good or they could just not hear me properly. It was a painful and frustrating moment for me as a 'newcomer'. Canagarajah (2019) argues that multilingual students encounter pain, difference, conflicts, and alienation as they cross borders. My encounters also show that I had, unfortunately, internalized that my way of speaking English will be judged as bad in my class. Baker-Bell (2019) asserts:

The only thing worse than Black students' experiencing anti-black linguistic racism in classrooms is when they internalize it. When Black students' language practices are suppressed in classrooms or they begin to absorb messages that imply that BL is deficient, wrong, and unintelligent, this could cause them to internalize anti-blackness and develop negative attitudes about their linguistic, racial, cultural, and intellectual identities and about themselves. (Baker-Bell, 2019, p.3)

I had internalized a system of linguistic inferiority, an internalized racism, in my own Ghanaian ways of speaking. I felt it was bad and will attract the condemnation and prejudice of the academic discourse community I found myself in. I wanted a safe escape, but it proved futile because I was trying to dissolve my sense of being a Ghanaian in a culture that I had only encountered for a few months. As incredulous as the moment was, I decided to be unadulterated regarding my cultural ways of speaking and behaving in a new transnational environment because I eventually saw my school as vastly diverse, considering the plethora of linguistic identities the campus embodied. These encounters

reinforce how national spaces and cultures impact the use of English in different locations in the way we use language, even if it is the same language. I was caught in the trap of linguistic performativity and wanting to belong. I realized that my performativity acts of mimicking American ways of speaking were dissonant with my cultural sense of being because it made me feel I was being negatively enculturated.

## **Section (II) Writing Identity**

### **Voice as a Discursive Strategy: Finding My Own Academic Voice**

In this section of this chapter, I provide evidence of my discursive strategies of voice from some of my graduate school papers. The examples for each voice-related construct will be between three and four; however, I will provide an appendix at the end of the study that has more examples. Structurally, I provide excerpts from my graduate school papers, and then the analysis of these excerpts will follow where I offer a detailed analysis grounded in the complex activity system of finding my own academic voice. Voice is one of the most important constructs of multilingual writing; however, I was unaware of its role in my academic writing and how voice significantly accounts for my agency as a multilingual writer in my disciplinary discourse. In this section, I discuss how I developed a writerly voice in my academic writing by utilizing Hyland's (2008) concept of stance and engagement as a framework to study and analyze my discursive strategies of voice. I selected these corpora that index voice in my writing from some of the graduate courses I took for my master's degree. However, for the purposes of brevity, most of the examples are put as appendix at the end of this work.



## **Stance and Engagements**

Hyland (2008) defines stance as “the writer’s textual voice or community-recognized personality, an attitudinal, writer-oriented function which concerns the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments” (p.7). In my analysis, I will specifically focus on stance and engagements in the data corpus of graduate school writing I did for some of the courses I took as part of my coursework requirements for my master’s degree. For all the instances of stance and engagements, the sentences are taken from courses on Cross-cultural issues in TESOL, Studies in Shakespeare, Introduction to Graduate Studies, Teaching Composition and Assessment and Testing in ESL, Studies in English Linguistics, and TESOL theoretical foundations. The examples cover a wide range of topics from gender in ESL, racism, Standard English ideologies, multimodality, and translanguaging. In the following pages, I offer evidence of stance and engagement markers in my writing through a thematic analysis. I have grouped these four stance-related elements as follows:

### **Hedges in My Writing**

In most of my writing, I found myself hedging to give room for my readers not to take my arguments as facts but as positions that can be countered. Hyland defines hedges as “devices that withhold complete commitment to a proposition, allowing information to be presented as opinion rather than facts” (Hyland, 2008). Hedges place a writer in an objective stance to communicate ideas with a non-committal motive. The devices that mark hedging and all the other tenets of voice cut across these genres; response papers/weekly discussion prompts, analysis papers, End of semester Application/research papers, and semester assignments) that I used in my papers are italicized and boldened below:

- The image presented in the EFL text *could* be a woman's image (ENG 341, Cross-Cultural Issues in TESOL, **Application paper**, Gender representations in EFL texts,)
- *I do not seek to discount* these historical biographies Parker presents as they are *somewhat* necessary for budding scholars to have a picturesque sense of their academic discipline. (ENG 401, Introduction to Graduate Studies, **Weekly discussion Prompt**, Microaggressions in the English Department)
- To shove culture under carpets while assessing learners is something that *could* unequivocally be detrimental to their learning. (ENG 346, Assessment and Testing in ESL, Weekly discussion Prompt, Culture as pivotal in L2 instruction and assessment)

### **Boosters in My Writing**

Boosters are devices that help writers to exert certainty and surety toward what they write (Hyland, 2008). My understanding of boosters is that it positions writers into an assertive stance to make categorical statements in their disciplinary discourse, leaving little or no room for disputation by readers. Boosters also show the writer's conviction towards their proposition, and they are marked by devices such as, of course, should, must, nobody, no one, etc. (Hyland, 2008). There is evidence of my writing that marks certainty towards what I write in the following graduate school papers:

- *Of course*, it is only right for such editors to write from a colonial lens; a lens that embraces systemic classifications of humans into the strong and the weak,

the essentialized, non-essentialized, proper, and the uncouth. (ENG 422, Conference Paper, Studies in Shakespeare, racism in Shakespeare's work)

- **Of course**, Africans have been at the mercy of these horrid images in many books. (ENG 341, Cross-Cultural Issues of TESOL, Application Paper, Representations in EFL textbooks)
- It is *unequivocally true* that within language specific cultures, L2 writers carry with them a plethora of voices that they use to navigate their socio-literate writing practices. (ENG 440, Studies in English Linguistics, Research Paper, Voice in L2 Composition)
- There is **NO WAY** scholars will talk about outer circle English without referring to Ghana, Nigeria, and Indian varieties of English (ENG 401, Introduction to Graduate Studies, Literature Review, World Englishes)

### **Attitude Markers**

Attitude markers index the writer's affective dispositions towards what they say or write that portrays frustration, agreement, surprise, and other expressive-driven factors (Hyland, 2008). Most of my graduate school papers had these kinds of rhetorical moves that enabled me to be 'affective' towards what I wrote. Hyland (2001; 2008) maintains that attitude markers help writers to position themselves in their disciplinary discourses marked by words such as surprise, excite, appalling, interesting, etc.

- What *excites* me in Guba's narrative is the futuristic solutions she proffers for a better English department. (ENG 401, Introduction to Graduate Studies, Weekly Discussion Prompt, Microaggressions in the English Department )

- It is a **surprise** that Slight's glosses are very racially denigrating in terms of descriptions of Othello and Desdemona's relationship. (ENG 422, Studies in Shakespeare, Conference Paper, Textual Glossing of Othello)

- Susana's experience with the Sonic Wings video game **is fascinating**, which reminds me of my own implicit learning from Spanish in a Netflix series I have been watching for the past two months. (ENG 402, Teaching Composition, Weekly Prompt, Everyday Translingualism)

- It is **unimaginable** how much inventiveness instructors could tap from their students when engaged in digital composition. (ENG 402, Teaching Composition, Weekly Prompt, Multimodality in the classroom)

### **Self-Mention**

Self-mention is the most preponderant stance marker in my writing. I have made countless mentions of myself all across my graduate school papers. Camps & Ivanic (2001) argue that self-representation is a human activity and one of the key realizations of voice in academic writing for multilingual students. Similarly, Hyland (2001) sees self-mention "as a powerful rhetorical strategy for emphasizing a writer's contribution" (p. 207). As a multilingual writer, self-mention has been a tool to exert agency and authoritativeness in my disciplinary discourse. The following are evidence from my graduate school papers:

- I argue that the inextricable link between bestiality and miscegenation as a non-normative sexual positionality is not a construct Shakespeare promulgated alone.... (ENG 422, Shakespeare Studies, Conference Paper, Race in Othello)
- I disagree with her stance on these varieties in (p. 377) (ENG 401, Introduction to Graduate Studies, Literature Review, Varieties of English)

- As a budding scholar, **I** vouch for situating genre writing in multimodal conceptualizations. (ENG 402, Weekly Prompt, Teaching Composition, Multimodality)
- **I** find the algorithm narrative quite preposterous in the sense of it finding mundane words like “the, for, to,” which could literally be in any text. (ENG 422, Weekly Prompt, Studies in Shakespeare, Authorship of Shakespeare)

### **Engagements**

Engagements refer to how writers rhetorically pull their readers along as participants of the discourse or argument (Hyland, 2001; Hyland 2008). Engagement markers in writing acknowledge readers as part of knowledge construction where writers recognize that readers would have contrary opinions and positionality on topics, arguments, and propositions made (Hyland, 2008). I also think that engagement is taking an equitable stance in writing, where equity implies valuing that your readers are also knowledgeable, opinionated, and have the mental capacity to dispute and take sides on what the writer presents. It is a rhetorical strategy of respecting the readership of one’s writing. Hyland (2008) argues that engagement is marked by reader pronouns, questions, knowledge, asides, reference, and directives. The following are some engagement markers from my graduate school papers.

### **Reader Pronouns**

Reader mention/ pronouns, according to Hyland (2008), is the “most explicit way of bringing readers into discourse” (p. 11). They are marked by inclusive we, our, ourselves, etc.

- When **we** superimpose **our** cultural ideals on others and see them as benchmarks for judging what is true, acceptable, and right, **we** lose sight of many valuable things another culture has. (ENG 341, Discussion Prompt, Cross-Cultural Issues in TESOL, Essentializing Cultures )

- **We** are all capable of having these purposeful conversations; translingualism is really not FARRR from **us**; it's **our** next-door neighbor!!!!!!!!!!!! (ENG 402, Course Plan, Teaching Composition, Embracing translingual pedagogies )
- ..... **we as educators** should avoid stereotyping these multilinguals as people with English language 'deficiencies' as well as how **we** can dismantle the hegemonies surrounding their learning of English. (ENG 346, Application Paper, Assessment in ESL, Stereotypes in the ESL classroom)

### **Analysis of Stance and Engagement in My Writing**

A study of my discursive strategies of voice reveals keen and crucial aspects of multilingual writing. The markers of voice in my writing, as evidenced above, show the following crucial factors as thematized below.

#### **Theme (I): Foregrounding and Power as Textual Positionality**

In some of the examples from my writing, I realized that I used academic terms as textual positioning to foreground some important aspects of the things I write. Ivanic & Camps (2001) define a textual position as “the writers' preferred ways of turning meanings into text” (p. 4). As a graduate student, I found myself positioning and organizing my texts in ways that will draw the attention of my readers as well as bring into focus some of the key ideas that are important subjects for discussion. By foregrounding, I refer to how I make certain words and phrases visible by capitalizing or writing them in block letters. Halliday (1977) defines foregrounding as ways that writers bring into focus certain keen features of a text for prominent effects. Sometimes, I do mix the lower-case letters with the upper case to foreground key elements of my writing. For instance, in the examples above from my graduate school papers , the words (NO WAY, and uP-TaKe were stylistically capitalized. (ENG

402)". The repetitive pattern of foregrounding some words in my writing is a crafty way of engaging my readers to focus on what I want as well give prominence to my arguments. For instance, the use of NO was to give an unequivocal stance on the arguments I was making. Utilizing foregrounding as positionality indexes how writers make choices from the linguistic options available they have to communicate a persona to their readers (Hyland, 2008). Even though Ivanic & Camps (2001) argue that "another form of textual positioning concerns a writer's apparent preferences among semiotic modes" (p. 29), I think that my ways of giving prominence to certain texts in my writing constitute a visual semiotic mode of organizing my writing. Foregrounding by capitalization in my writing may not be an explicit mark of a semiotic textual organization; however, I believe that once a part of a text stands out, it visually communicates to readers to see those sections as important parts that need attention. My intention for foregrounding is not to "shout" in my writing; typically, when people use capitals, it is meant to grab someone's attention while "raising voice" in writing. Although foregrounding constitutes 'a pull your reader along strategy' for me as a writer, I believe that by writing some of these texts in upper case letters, I inadvertently appeal to my readers who like to also read in certain textually creative modes. A careful look at my writing this way shows that multilingual strategies of voice take different forms that we may not be aware of. A lack of rhetorical awareness of how we mark voice in our writing can position us as powerless and non-agentive in our writing. Similarly, my textual positioning also reveals issues of equity and power between myself and my readers. I make this assertion in relation to the use of engagement markers such as may, somewhat, could, we, etc., in my writing.

Even though Hyland (2008) posits that the use of reader pronouns brings our readers into our discourse which shows that they have or share an understanding of things written, I believe that the use of these linguistic devices marks power distribution in my writing. By creating room for my readers to dispute my claims and assertions through my use of hedges such as 'may, could, I do not seek to

discount' etc., I take an equitable stance in writing where equity implies valuing that your readers are also knowledgeable, opinionated, and have the mental capacity to dispute and take sides on what you present as a writer. On power relations in writing, Johns et al. (2006) posit that "writers use language in particular ways according to the aim and purpose of the genre and the relationship between the writer and the audience" (p. 235). Trying to establish symmetrical power relationships in writing is a rhetorical strategy for respecting the readership of one's writing. Equity stance can also be 'broken' when writers make categorical assertions and arguments. Ivanič & Camps (2001) also mention that "most academic discourse is written in the declarative form: performing the speech acts of informing or asserting, which in themselves are mild impositions of authority over the reader" (p. 26). For instance, by saying, "I believe, I vouch, I assert, I disagree", I mark my writing with hefty surety that positions me as an authoritative, agentic, and more powerful persona over my readers. My eventual understanding is that the choice of linguistic devices can bridge power and equity in writing. Power is nuanced as an undertone of writing—at one point, I become superintendent over my readers, exerting my positionality on them; at another point, we become 'equal' members sharing similar knowledge in our disciplinary boundaries. Additionally, my analysis of voice shows how I positioned myself within the novice membership of my disciplinary discourse and community. From the evidence from my graduate school papers, you would see examples such as "As a budding scholar of TESOL and Applied Linguistics". In some cases, in my writing, I positioned myself as knowledgeable and agentic over my readers by making categorical statements; however, in some cases, I subjugate myself as a novice member who respects that there are 'the big names/members' in my disciplinary community.



Hyland (2008) argues that in writing, “we position ourselves in relation to our communities” (p. 6). In positioning myself as a junior member of my disciplinary community, I see my positionality as learning “to construct a situated understanding of the issues in their fields of study” (Seloni, 2012, p. 51). Similarly, in her study of a Colombian artist’s MA thesis writing experience, Seloni (2014) found that the use of self-mentions in Jacob’s writing elucidated his writer visibility and recognition identity as well as his relationship with the audience of his thesis, emphasizing self-mention as an important facet of multilingual writing. In reifying negotiations of identity in writing, Hyland (2008) mentions that “we achieve voice through the ways we negotiate representation of ourselves and take on discourse of our communities” (P. 6).

My positionality indexes that the identity of multilingual students in their disciplinary communities is sometimes unstable and staggering where we feel powerful at one stage when we write for peer readership but feel less empowering when writing or communicating to ‘big names’ in our fields including our instructors. The hierarchical notions of novice and expert relationship is an abstraction to some extent because even the so-called “experts” are not all-knowing figures, and their knowledge base is also constantly evolving based on the changing conditions, theories, and multitude of settings they teach. Hirvela and Belcher (2022) wrote a paper about how the field of L2 writing teacher education needs a better conceptualization of expertise. To them, scholarship on L2 instructors’ practices a rare in Second Language Writing (SLW) research because there is no definite caveat for defining what an expert teacher in L2 writing is. While the term ‘expertise’ continues to permeate L2 writing instruction circles, it becomes expedient to have a basis for defining how expertise is gained and conceptualized.

## **Theme (II): Self-Representation as an Integral Part of my Multilingual Identity**

One of the keen pedagogical illuminations of analyzing voice in my writing is understanding voice as an inclusive tenet of my identity as a multilingual writer. Most international students may not know how they construct voice in their writing because they might not yet have a rhetorical awareness of how certain stances they take in their disciplinary writing mark their voice, or they might not have been taught of the value of paying attention to such discourse markers. On concretizing voice as part of the multilingual writer identity, Matsuda (2001) argues against the idea of voice as an exclusively individualistic ideology. By individualism, Matsuda (2001) refers to the fact that the notion of voice is not a new concept to the 'other cultures'. This also corroborates the assertions of Hirvela & Belcher (2001) that multilingual writers of English are not voiceless writers. Hirvela & Belcher (2001) further argue that multilingual writers in graduate schools bring into their education established and formidable identities in their cultures as well as trajectories of success in their academic and professional lives. They argue that voice is not something to be taught and acquired but rather a tool to understand the nuanced experiences that characterize writing in different languages. The arguments by these scholars are valid and true as I identify with their positionality. My use of foregrounding and self-mention is something that I have been doing back in Ghana as a college student; the only thing is a lack of rhetorical awareness of them as constituents of voice. Voice, then, is not "an optional extra" (Ivanic & Camps, 2001, p. 3). What may be the problem is that the discursive and rhetorical traditions/strategies of marking voice may be different from the target language and culture (Matsuda,2001). Within my own Akan traditions, I was taught to be bold, assertive, and unapologetic in centering my voice and fighting for what is right. It is, therefore, not a surprise that my writing carry tones of power and assertiveness. I had the 'soft boy' kind of persona growing up; my father would always scold me for being soft on issues, whether it was about an argument with a friend while playing or being reticent to whatever harsh words someone used for me in my formative years. My experience

shows how masculine expectations of a patriarchal society deeply impact the way we do things—but that does not mean that they cannot be changed.

Being the first son became a bad trait since most Akans believe that the first son should be bold and unapologetic for the younger siblings to follow. I started to imbibe the ‘Akan boldness when I was fifteen, which eventually crept into my writing carrying tones of confidence. This memory I share may reinforce some patriarchal chauvinistic tendencies as most females in similar positionalities of being the first child are not taught the same precepts but are told to be subservient. In Matsuda’s work (2001) on the multiple voices of Japanese writers, he identifies that Japanese discursive features of voice are not the same as that of English; therefore, Japanese students studying in the US may have challenges negotiating voice in their writing. His assertion reveals how different cultural spaces of socialization may impact how we shuttle voice as pillars of writing. Kubota (2001) also argues in her critical work on how Japanese culture has been essentialized thinking where Japanese writers/students do not have or do not know how to assert their voice because of their culture. A similar argument was made about critical thinking skills—that certain cultures do not own this, and this was really problematic Atkinson (1997) was once criticized by writing about this in a way that reduces Asian people to non-critical thinkers). Kubota (2001) fought with this line of thinking many years asserting that it is also within Japanese culture that people know how to be critical or assertive. This dichotomous way of thinking, which impacts our teaching, creates stereotypes and other students who might not come from Western traditions. For me, as an Akan speaker, voice is a construct that is part of sociolinguistic traditions. A voiceless man is deemed weak and frail and will be unproductive in future leadership endeavors.

Understanding that international students come to US educational contexts with multiple voices will help L2 educators and students to co-negotiate for meaning because “meaning has to be

co-constructed through collaborative strategies” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 43). The conundrum of understanding the unique features of voice of multilingual students by L2 teachers in US contexts can be bridged by knowing that “Negotiating discursive identity is much less troublesome when the writer and the reader have lived through similar discursive practices” (Matsuda, 2001, p. 39). It is important for instructors to recognize the multitude of voices that international student writers bring because it is in their writing and in particular in their English variations that these voice issues can be made visible and transparent. Without such profound understanding, some US teachers may not understand the different strategies of voice enactments in the writings of international students and may mark it as non-standard-

### **Theme (III): Voice Markers as Gender Disposition**

Another important theme that emerged from my strategies of voice is my gender disposition in my writing which is represented by my choice of pronouns. I had not quite thought of a pattern of gender disposition in my writing until I started to do an analysis of voice markers in my writing. My identity as a Ghanaian informed my choice of certain linguistic markers of gender. Selvi & Kocaman (2021), in their article on gender representations in English Language textbooks, posit that the ELT classroom is a “dynamic space of/for the (re)production, (re)invention, and constant negotiation of multiple identities” (p. 118). These multiple identities can be sexual, racial, and linguistic in their characterization. I found out that I have a certain gender disposition towards scholars or people I write about where I constantly recognize only two gender positionalities (he/she). When I make arguments or synthesize arguments by scholars, I automatically use he or she for them without paying attention to their preferred ways of gender representation. My constant use of he/she is influenced by my cultural background as a Ghanaian, where we only make references to two gender positionalities as the norm. As a student who has spent a greater number of years schooling and writing in Ghana, I

have only become used to a feminine and masculine representations of people. Although I have been socialized into a new educational environment where there is a discourse on the recognition of various sexual identities, I believe that I have not developed the cultural capital to reorient my gender positionalities from a heteronormative stance to a gender-neutral stance (they). It is not out of disrespect for other sexual dispositions in my American educational environment, but it is heftily motivated by my Akan socialization of recognition of two gender positionalities (male/female). My biliteracy writing practices as an Akan speaker are reified in what Ivanic & Camps (2001) term as representation of the world. Ivanic & Camps (2001) position that though writing is devoid of prosodic features of the language, writers appear to be associated with certain social groups and gender identities through the linguistic choices they make where they show who they are as writers. In this case, my writing takes a cisgender stance influenced by my Ghanaian identity. In as much as I use, he/she as grammatical markers of my gender positionality, some people may refer to it as linguistic sexism, a term that Selvi & Kocaman (2021) refer to as “gender bias caused by order of mention, or firstness” (p. 121). Similarly, Lee & Collins (2009) found out that ELT materials are contributive factors to some of the linguistic sexism because most of the ELT materials make reference to certain gender positions (male/female) as against other ‘non-normative’ genders. A chunk of the reasons for using he/she in my representations of scholars/personalities in my writing is influenced by the English Language materials I was introduced to in my formative literacy developments. Selvi & Kocaman (2021) argue that ELT materials have significant impacts on second language writing and teaching. Lee & Collins (2009) argue for the use of ‘they’ as a lexical item to bridge gender disparities which I believe is valid considering the multiple groups of identities that make up US classrooms. Therefore, my linguistic choices are not an explicit inattention/value of other genders but are largely underpinned by my Akan socialization and the choice of reading materials. One’s biliteracy writing practices can be nuanced as

it may complicate issues of gender representation based on cultural upbringing and ideas of representing people, ideas, and positionalities in a seemingly new educational/cultural context.

#### **Theme (IV): Challenging Systems: Voice as a Counter Strategy**

Having studied my writing thoroughly, I also realized that voice has been a tool that I have used to challenge and counter certain systems and ideologies. I found this mostly in my use of boosters in my writing, which is marked by lexical items like ‘no one, nobody, cannot, disagree, unequivocal, etc. As part of my self-representation acts, I have seen that the mentioned booster markers enabled me to maintain an assertive stance on issues that tainted black identities, racial denigration of blacks, ownership of English, and neglect of black linguistic identities. Hyland (2008) explicitly notes that boosters represent an alternative position or viewpoints of readers. Voice is then not new to multilingual students (Matsuda, 2001), and it is not something that is taught (Belcher & Hirvela, 2001) because my writing history (from Ghana) has had boosters that countered some of the issues mentioned above. I have had professors tell me that I have a powerful voice in my writing, even though I did not quite understand what it meant then; I believe that multilingual students come to new educational environments and “draw on the repertoire of voices they have encountered in their experience of participating in genres and discourses” (Ivanic & Camps, 2001, p. 6). I have repletely drawn on past writing from my undergraduate studies, and discourses on postcoloniality to counter systems and practices unapologetically. Our discourses and thoughts as international students matter. Transnational writers should be impenitent in centering discourses and counter-stories that destabilize our identities, race, and acculturation. Inarguably, academic writing is an important tool to bring in decolonial practices.

### **Theme (V): Voice as a Way of Knowing: Imitating Disciplinary Ways of Writing**

Even though I have established some form of assertiveness and confidence in my writing through self-representation and some booster markers, I have keenly observed through my strategies of voice that I have learned to become a legitimate participant in my disciplinary discourse by learning how scholars in the field of Applied Linguistics write. Even though I have a bachelor's degree in English Education from Ghana, I had not quite fully mastered the usage of key disciplinary terminologies/lexical bundles that set the tone of my writing in TESOL. Barbieri & Biber (2007) define lexical bundles as "recurrent sequences of words" (p. 263). Through exposure to research articles and other publications in the field, I have craftily mastered how to align my writing to communicate with members who share the same disciplinary knowledge. I have learned how to use certain lexical items by imitating experienced writers in the field. Canagarajah (2002) states that "If a student doesn't adopt the established discourses of a discipline, then she simply loses her claim for membership in that community" (p. 32). For me as a student, this assertion means that without the right understanding of the appropriate disciplinary language, I will feel alienated from the field that I claim to be a member of.

The following are words I have used frequently in my disciplinary discourse; some of them are single-word items, while others are multiword items that have become my disciplinary stock of words.

**Table II: Gabriel’s most frequently used terminologies (See more in Appendix B)**

|                        |                                |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Rhetorical practices,  | Co-construction of meaning     |
| Linguistic orientation | Identity construction          |
| Translingual Identity  | Dexterity                      |
| Academic Socialization | Anti-racist pedagogy           |
| Mediational tools      | Teacher practitioner           |
| Artifacts              | Educational histories          |
| Home literacies        | Culturally Responsive Pedagogy |
| Academic trajectory    | Monolingual Ideology           |

The table above constitutes lexical bundles that I learned from scholars to be able to communicate a disciplinary persona in the field of Applied Linguistics. In accentuating novice writer difficulties, Zhang, S., Yu, H., & Zhang, L. J. (2021) posit that “novice writers constructing academic writing often encounter difficulties regarding the proficient use of disciplinary language” (p. 1). To them, the reasons for such difficulty is due to being new to the discipline, which may take a while for newer members to grasp disciplinary ways of writing; therefore, it is important for new members of a discipline to study the academic writing conventions of their discipline. I had fears in my early days as a graduate student in the US about how I could communicate effectively in my writing to people within the locus of my discipline; the fear emanated from positioning myself as a novice member of my disciplinary community. I needed coaching to scaffold me to disciplinary ways of writing even though I benefited from some members of my disciplinary community. As evidenced by the examples I provided on my strategies of voice, I learned how to write in my field by studying how writers made rhetorical moves of establishing a niche, counterclaim, indicating a gap (Swales, 1990) by reading research papers in the field because “a good command of lexical bundles could be indicative of a proficient and professional academic writer and is thus considered a pivotal skill for student writers”



(Zhang, S., Yu, H., & Zhang, L. J. 2021, p. 1). For instance, in establishing territory (Swales 1990), which means setting the context and background of one's study as well as making topic generalizations, I imitated and learned to write that way from scholars in my field.

My imitative practices show that I operated on fears of unacceptance—where unacceptance, in my case, means not being accepted by faculty because my writing would probably not communicate that I understand the disciplinary ways of writing in Applied Linguistics. International students may feel unaccepted in the confines of their discipline if they are unable to communicate a disciplinary persona, where unacceptance means not being accepted as a legitimate member if I do not communicate by using the right terminologies in my field of study. Hyland (2008) argues that adopting disciplinary language means “using a language which establishes relationships between people and ideas” (p. 7). As a student, it was a way of establishing a formidable relationship with the audience of the papers I wrote and getting recognition as an accepted member of the field because without the right disciplinary language, I felt I was not communicating as a scholar, which would make me a mere ‘sojourner’ in my field of study.

### **The Role of Pidgin in My Writing: A Ghanaian Identity**

Pidgins have been part of my linguistic repertoire since I started Senior High School in Ghana; it is a common language among Ghanaian youth who have had considerable secondary school education. Dako & Bonnie (2014) mention that student pidgin (SP) started in Ghana among the prestigious secondary schools in the central region (Cape Coast) of Ghana in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and presently it is also used among some Ghanaian female students in tertiary institutions. In terms of its social viability and recognition, Adika (2012) states that it has not been recognized as a language because there is no standard orthography. Rupp (2013) also argues that “the fact that students use Student Pidgin seems unexpected, considering the fact that they are competent speakers of Standard English” (p. 13). Alternatively, ministers of state and other keen stakeholders of education

in Ghana have bashed Ghanaian pidgins and have counseled that students avoid using it completely in their speaking, which inadvertently transfers into their writing. In problematizing Ghanaian pidgins (GhaPE), Adika (2012) argues that GhaPE competes with the indigenous languages, and it is partly to blame for the falling standards of English among students. As a graduate student, I use pidgin because of the bond and solidarity it gives in my socialization with colleagues within the Ghanaian sociolinguistic setup. Within the Ghanaian linguistic landscape, there are various varieties of pidgin. According to Adika (2012), there is a basilectal Ghanaian pidgin (GhaPE), which people speak in Ghana with little formal education, and a mesolectal/acrolectal pidgin, which students speak.

I have found myself using pidgins in my writing on a few occasions; even though there are not many in my writing, I find it expedient to talk about in this thesis since pidgin is like a third language in my linguistic repertoire. I speak pidgin every day with my Ghanaian folks in ISU; it is, therefore, not a surprise to find traces of pidgin in my writing. The following are a few excerpts from my graduate school papers where I used pidginized English:

- The tag “English wives” (pg.15) is “nauseating” to a woman who has the same level of graduate qualification as the man she is married to, **but dem no dey [but they did not]** give her opportunity as a result of her gender. (ENG 401, Writing Prompt)
- For ethical and confidentiality reasons, **ago refer to dem [I will refer to them]** in this narrative report as first and second interviewees. (ENG 346 Application Paper)
- **As the lesson dey go on, she biz en students say [As the lesson went on, she asked her students], “What do you see in the questions?”** (ENG 440 Inquiry-based project)
  - Though she believes that **I go fi learn [I could learn]** English later through formal instruction, she made sure that (ENG 343 Language learning Trajectory project)
  - **Teachers for try to have knowledge [Teachers have to]** about the linguistic backgrounds of their students. (ENG 343 Learning Log)

Syntactically, the structure of Ghanaian student pidgins is interesting; according to Dako & Bonnie (2014), futurity is marked by the verbal element 'go'. Examples (c) exemplify futurity. Also, from my *example (d)*, I realized that 'go' can also indicate continuity or progressiveness. The use of 'en' in most students' pidgin is a gender-neutral pidgin word for *him/her*. *Fi* in (*example e*) is a pidgin modal that combines with 'go' sometimes to indicate one's ability to do something. *No* in *example (a)* is more of a negative particle. *For* in the last example is equivalent to 'have' in English sentences. The examples above were found in my writing as a result of unconscious transfers-I mostly have discussions on papers I write with a fellow Ghanaian master's student in English at ISU, I end up transferring the conversations into my writing. This is not a new phenomenon in my academic trajectory; I have had professors in Ghana complain on a few occasions of traces of pidgin in my undergraduate papers. Pidgin is another space for language transfer, but it has over the years been misappropriated, together with creoles in international students writing as obtrusive deficiencies; however, in this thesis, I want to emphasize the position of pidgin as an important linguistic resource. Apart from thinking in my home language, Twi, before I write any paper, pidgin is another useful language that I use in academic conversations with my Ghanaian folks. Canagarajah (2006) posits that multilingual students utilize resources they enjoy from their vernacular to enhance their writing. This means that multilingual students make use of other linguistic resources in communication aside from English; in my case, pidgin was that useful linguistic repertoire I drew on to communicate. Besides the social prestige of pidgins, I have found it very essential in my academic thought processes. Treating pidgins as deficiencies in multilingual students' writing stems from our prejudice about people's language resources as well as our lack of negotiation for meaning (Canagarajah, 2013). Similarly, Hyland (2001) argues that writing is a crucial social activity that helps to negotiate identities. This means that within the activity system of writing, individuals bring various identities to play through their language choices. My use of pidgin shows an important linguistic identity of most Ghanaian male

students who use pidgin as a social and academic language depending on the linguistic situation. For fear of being judged in my writing, I always erased them from my writing before turning in the final work which eventually resulted in my inability to get more evidence of pidgins for this thesis. For most international students in West-African states like Ghana and Nigeria, pidgins constitute a huge linguistic resource. Considering the robustness of World Englishes in our dispensation as 21<sup>st</sup> century writers, pidgins need to be part of heterogeneous language education in writing classrooms. Horner & Trimbur (2002) argue that “a tacit language policy of unidirectional English monolingualism has shaped the historical formation of U.S. writing instruction and continues to influence its theory and practice” (p. 594). The argument by Horner and Trimbur (2002) unveils how the US classroom has subtly glossed over other language characteristics and identities that make the US a site of mixed interactions of people from different historical contexts.

Since most international students have chosen the US as a top spot for graduate education, composition classrooms in the US should reorient their minds from English-only ideologies in order to cater for the rich language resources of international graduate students.

### **Shifts in Writing Ideologies Across Different Cultural Spaces: From Ghana to US**

This section addresses research question (3), which interrogates some of the challenges and affordances I meet as I engage in writing for graduate school as an Akan speaker of English. I first discuss the intricacies of shuttling two culturally different educational terrains and then move to discussions about how my prior writing pedagogies have been impacted, disrupted, and evolved.

My understanding of writing prior to being a graduate student in the United States constituted a singular view—a view that ideationally saw writing as putting strings of words on a paper. I had not quite come to terms with nuanced ideas about writing in my undergraduate foundations as an English major. Predominantly, my writing was composed of a five-paragraph lens where I had to structure my writing with a noticeable thesis statement/topic sentence with five supporting paragraphs for almost

all the essays and papers I wrote. Without this formulaic templated writing structure, teachers in my formative years as a student in Ghana turned to mark any writing that deviated from this ‘normative’ practice as non-standard. (Caplan & Johns, 2019; Tardy, 2019; Ortmeier-Hopper (2019) and several others in the field of second language writing objects to the view that writing has always been taught from the five-paragraph perspective and argues that it is a justification to entrench bad writing practices. I did not see anything wrong with it as a writing practice. In my undergraduate days, I was introduced to some process writing pedagogies in my advanced composition class, but five-paragraph essays were still preponderant in some texts that I wrote. Since that was what I was taught, I perceived that I would utilize it to be successful in my new academic environment as a graduate student in the US. Seloni & Lee (2019) discuss how five-paragraph essays are so prevalent in many non-English dominant contexts. To some extent, my experiences show that writing pedagogy may not be really diverse in many EFL and ESL contexts due to conservativeness on the part of some L2 instructors in ESL contexts. Here, conservativeness refers to an unwillingness to learn new pedagogies about writing. Additionally, in most Ghanaian institutions, there is strict adherence to grammar as an important component of writing.

The language expectation in the Ghanaian curriculum for writing courses (Communication skills) largely focused on helping students to know more about syntactic rules (tenses, aspects, phrases, clauses). In Ghana, the Communication Skills course, which is equivalent to the First Year Composition (FYC) course in the United States, is designed as a course for all students to help develop effective language skills for academic work (vocabulary, citation, , and concord, reading practices etc). After taking this course in 2015, I gained considerable grammatical insights on sentence structure and organization as well as paragraph development which were ingrained in five-paragraph essay ideologies. This was the singular view I had about writing.

In my first semester in the fall of 2021, I took a mandatory course in Teaching Composition—a course that gives all Graduate Teaching Assistants the pedagogical tools and knowledge to teach the first-year ENG 101 course. The Teaching Composition course became a site of illumination for me as an international student from Ghana. There was a seemingly different approach to writing that inundated me and gave me different perspectives about writing as well. In the early days of the class, I could not understand the sociocultural approaches to writing that the program embraced. Although I knew about the intersecting roles of language and culture, I did not really understand how the Writing Program at Illinois State University conceptualized writing by using CHAT (Cultural Historical Activity Theory), a theory that is used to investigate literate activities. Walker (2017) defines literate activity as “all of the various things that people do, all the tools they use, all the interactions they have when they write in the world” (p. 1). My antecedent knowledge about writing was quite limited, and after one month in the class, I could still not construe what writing was in the context I found myself. It was overwhelming when I saw how other students enjoyed the class while I had zero knowledge about what writing means in the US context. Maringe & Jenkins (2015) indicate that western writing traditions can be burdensome to international students and that was exactly how I felt within that moment.

The point of illumination eventually came after I read Paul Prior’s (2006) sociocultural theories of writing, which debunked the strictly governed rules of writing. Prior (2006) posits that writing is a situated activity that involves mediational activities/tools/artifacts as well as intersecting cultures and languages that impact writing. I started seeing writing as an intricately complex activity that involves several artifacts and tools. After reading Paul Prior’s work, I decided to go back to an article that I had read three times earlier with no understanding. This article was *The Adventures of the CHATPERSON and the ANT: CHAT as a Writing Pedagogy* by Joyce Walker, which was assigned in the Teaching Composition class. The article reiterated the complicated nature of writing and the various

tools, spaces, and artifacts that intersect in the writing process. Walker (2017), through the CHAT pedagogy, helped me to understand that singularly learning a way to write and terming it as good or bad is problematic because “the mission of CHAT person and the ANT is to help us see that we can be more successful (over time) in our efforts at writing (and at teaching writing) if we work to investigate the different people, tools, situations, genres, mental perspectives and emotions that shape how, why, when and what writing gets done in the world” (Walker, 2017, p. 3). A mental shift in writing to this epiphanic understanding of writing in the US really helped me to see writing as an interconnected activity with several components from eight core principles: production (how texts are produced), representation (how we think about texts), reception (how we receive writing/text), distribution (how texts are shared/distributed), socialization (how texts foster socialization), ecology (environmental factors that affect the distribution of texts) and activity (all the things we do when we engage in writing (CHAT Terms, ISU Writing program). I started embracing these new ideologies in my writing as a graduate student. The eventual consequence of seeing writing differently in the US classroom was that my writing and teaching started to align with my new truths and understanding of writing. For instance, Canagarajah (2006) argues that writing is not a “narrowly defined process of text construction” (p. 602). Here, his arguments push for having open ideologies about writing where writing is not the final destination of text construction; rather, we must be concerned with the processes involved in writing where we ask ourselves of the L2 composing strategies of multilingual writers.

Analytically reflecting on this, I think that the different cultural spaces we inhabit as multilingual students breed new perspectives about writing that help us to embrace new ways of meaning-making as we construct texts.

Even though I had been educated in both product/process-oriented approaches to writing, a term (product-oriented) that Ferris & Hedgcock (2014) describe as introducing writing in modes such as compare and contrast, where instructors give students templated writing for students to imitate rhetorically, it was quite difficult for me to adjust to my new understanding of writing. Product-oriented writing is not only problematic but constitutes rigid and formulaic practices that I believe stifle students' complex understanding of the literate practices involved in writing as well as an ideology that prevents students from interrogating the various facets of writing as a messy activity. The rigid conventions of five-paragraph ideologies as "quick fixes" (Caplan & Johns, 2019) prevent students from seeing writing as a very procedural process-based activity. My reading of Ferris & Hedgcock's (2013) socio-literate ideologies about writing from a process-oriented approach which emphasizes guiding L2 writers to build knowledge and skills in their communities of practice, also made me think of the pivotal role L2 instructors have to play in helping L2 writers to be successful in their literacy skills. From my experience, some international students may come into new transnational spaces like the US with little or no knowledge about other intricately important aspects of writing in different genres. It, therefore, births resistance to some of these new ideologies of writing. By resistance, I refer to how I was not open to embracing these new ideas about writing in my early days as a graduate student in the US. L2 instructors also have a crucial role in selecting appropriate genres/texts that will help students to be critical about the rhetorical conventions of a myriad of texts that will be useful in both academic and after school trajectories.

In my experience as a student in Ghana, I did not explore many genres/texts such as book reviews, FAQs, Autobiographies, and thesis/dissertations to become familiar with their conventions. Teachers must not assume that students automatically know the conventions of these kinds of genres; a core aspect of helping students to be successful in new academic discourse communities and environments is helping students to deconstruct texts/genres to develop an awareness of how these



genres work or operate in the real world. I did not have enough understanding of the rhetorical structures of important genres that I should have known before this graduate school journey because writing tasks were organized along what Caplan & Johns (2019) refers to as modes. According to Caplan & Johns (2019), most genres, such as literature reviews, consist of several modes where students can have the opportunity to be argumentative and summarize their thoughts. Organizing writing tasks in genres is, therefore, a double-edged sword approach that will develop two or more writing modes in L2 writers.

### **Genre Terror: My Evolving Conceptual Knowledge of Genres**

My evolving conceptual knowledge of genres constitutes a core aspect of shifts in writing ideologies being an international graduate student in the United States from Ghana. During the fall 2021 Graduate Assistantship orientation, held by the ISU Writing program directorate of the English department, I first heard the consistent mention of the term ‘genres’. I could not quite make sense of the term and how it was being conceptualized from the presentation by the various experienced writing program instructors. The various presenters defined and explained “genres as typified responses to recurring situations” (Miller, 1984, p. 159). They further explained genres as having audience, purpose, and as materials with communicative and social functions. The first day of the orientation went by, and I had hopes of getting insights into the idea of genres and genre pedagogies that seemed to be central in the writing program. The orientation ended with me having an absolute zero understanding of what genres meant, this extremely inundated me because I felt I had missed a very important aspect of the orientation, which would be useful in my teaching of the ENG 101 classes considering how consistent the term came up during the orientation.

However, I told myself that I was going to do all I can to get a hold of the conceptualization of genres in the writing program. As I mentioned in the earlier narrative, all Graduate Teaching Assistants in the English department at ISU had to take ENG 402, Teaching

Composition as a compulsory course to be better positioned to teach the ENG 101 classes. My thoughts and plans of getting properly acquainted with genres and genre pedagogies failed menacingly. Two months into the class, I could still not understand the conceptualization of genres in the class and the thought of not being able to get a hold of it terrified me since I had to eventually teach it to students. This experience of not getting the genre concept is the most inundating experience of my graduate school journey. I watched all the instructor materials which included videos and articles that the ISU Writing program provided but I could still not make headway with the terminology. There were moments when I would cry because the Teaching Composition course overwhelmed me so much that I could not take it anymore. The eventual consequence of not understanding the concept made me have some resistance motives towards anything that espoused genre concepts in the classes I took in my first year. Tardy et.al (2018) mention that many Graduate Teaching Assistants come into US writing classrooms having unfamiliar knowledge about genres which breeds resistant approaches to genre pedagogies. Similarly, Schenider (2018) states that the rhetorical reality of juggling new writing conventions can be hard for international students since their writing is embedded in a new culture. This was my case, I struggled with how genres were theorized in my new academic environment, and that made me have apathy towards it which eventually led to relentless worries and anxieties about my position as a graduate student who had just been admitted as a 'good' candidate for the masters in English program. I come from an educational context where the term genre only referred to categories of texts anytime, I heard of it. As a student who loves literature, the term genres only existed in my mind as a classification of things (music, arts, literary genres-drama/prose/poetry).

Throughout my four-year journey, I never heard any professor talk about genres in a similar fashion as ISU's department of English. My disciplinary orientation and educational experience as a Ghanaian student only gave me a singular purview of genres. Tardy et.al (2018) point out that many composition instructors and GTA's are influenced by their disciplinary orientations, which makes

them bring divergent ideologies of genres into their new discourse communities. Their study also found a gap in explicit research on the genre knowledge of composition teachers considering the heuristic role of genre theories in writing instruction (Tardy et al., 2018). My lack of genre knowledge and awareness explicates how writing pedagogies profoundly differ from two cultural stances (Ghana and the US). In the early days of my graduate school journey, I tried to use my antecedent knowledge about genres as categories of texts to understand genre theories, but it failed. This shows how some of our antecedent knowledge about writing can be disruptive in helping us understand new concepts in writing classrooms in new transnational environments (ISU Writing Program). Assumptions about genre knowledge can be detrimental to new students because different cultural spaces have different caveats for understanding writing pedagogies. Reflecting on this experience, I also want to emphasize how Institutional courses and materials in US classrooms can be helpful in helping new international graduate students in writing classrooms to develop genre awareness that will help them in their teaching and research. Two courses (Assessment and Testing in ESL and Studies in English Linguistics) that I took in my second year as a graduate student helped me to grasp the concept of genre-based instruction. These courses concurrently exposed me to embrace genre-based instruction grounded in systemic functional linguistics. My resistance approaches started to diminish, allowing more space for me to construe genres as fluid, purposeful texts that have a goal. I also allowed myself to learn about genre-based pedagogy through cohort meetings and online in-training writing summits.

Tardy et al. (2022) found that in their study of studying the genre-based pedagogy experiences of six writing instructors where they found that strong and ongoing teacher preparation and support are necessary to ensure that teachers' pedagogical content understanding of genre develop through the development of genre-based rubrics or formative assessment activities.

Getting quality classroom instruction on genre coupled with training from writing summits helped me to see genre-based instruction and SFL as closely-knit concepts that help students to get

language and content knowledge to succeed in schools. It also allowed me to see how authors make certain linguistic choices in meaning construction. Johns et al. (2006) point out that “one reason that second language writers find academic genres so daunting is that they are frequently told, by textbooks, style guides, and sometimes by teachers, to abandon their personality and write in an “objective,” neutral way” (p.236). My mind shifted from the rigid rhetorical conventions of text to seeing texts as fluid, purposeful materials. I became confident and excited about this pedagogical illumination that helped me to teach students how to deconstruct texts to find out their purposes, audience, and social importance. Institutional materials and courses are fundamental scaffolds that help new students to situate themselves in new ideologies about writing. Although I could not make use of Teaching Composition as a course, probably due to extreme anxieties about being socialized in a new transnational environment, I have realized how all these experiences point to issues of accountability—Gilliland and Pella (2017) describe accountability as helping students to know what they are supposed to know in their new discourse communities as well as helping them with materials that will help them thrive across all domains (academically, emotionally, and socially). The professors in my 402 and 440 classes painstakingly took their time to help me imbibe genre-based pedagogies, I remember how I excitedly pointed out in their classes how joyful I am of their tutelage. Building genre knowledge in students also constitutes a visible pedagogy approach where students get not only to see texts as what it is, but teachers help students to analyze and deconstruct texts to get a hold of the intricate nature of texts and how they operate.

In these classes, my professors analyzed various texts with students, which helped me replicate these methods in my ENG 101 classes. Additionally, my evolving genre knowledge also opens the buds on how teachers in different cultural settings must be reflective of their teaching/writing practices.

## **Embracing Translingual and Multimodal Pedagogies in My Writing**

Another interesting shift in ideologies of writing is my eventual understanding of translanguaging and multimodal literacies. Translanguaging, according to Garcia (2009a), is “a multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual words” (p. 45). This definition means that bilinguals use various linguistic repertoires as a unified system to construct meaning through writing and speaking. The use of such linguistic resources (vernacular, semiotic resources) is not deficient but rather a resource that helps bilinguals to mediate their learning of the target language. Canagarajah (2006;2011; 2015) has argued against seeing multilinguals use of their home language and semiotic resources as unimportant in L2 instruction. His arguments are premised on hefty reliance on native speaker ideologies that have evaded L2 instruction and writing. In my educational experience as a student in Ghana, students were punished in schools for speaking their local languages in schools. The entrenchment of strict adherence to speaking English in schools through Ghana’s policy of education which has become a site of contention in terms of the choice of a local language as against English, was the norm in my formative years as a student (Owu-Awie, 2006; Ansah 2014). This traditional convention did not create space for me to think that my home language would be a valuable resource in my learning. If someone had told me that earlier, it would have been a fanciful idea, that I would have treated it with no seriousness. However, being a graduate in the United States, I had a changed perspective on how translanguaging pedagogy is very much welcomed in writing classrooms. Admittedly, this was the first time I had heard the term translanguaging in my entire educational life. I initially envisaged that a translingual approach to teaching meant learning one or more languages as a teacher to be able to communicate with your students effectively.

Almost all the courses I took hammered on translingual and how important it is considering the sociolinguistic demographics of the United States and other places where many languages coexist.

I started to have profound shifts in ideologies that sort to devalue multilingual identities and cultures. One does not necessarily have to learn more than one language to practice translanguaging; instead, within a single language, translanguaging can happen. I began to realize the power translanguaging has given me, considering the fact that it helps to account for languages and identities that have been minoritized. Being a Ghanaian national, I had never conceived that utilizing students' home language as a resource could profoundly scaffold learners to learn and write better. My consistent encounter with translanguaging throughout this two-year journey makes me question how native-speaker ideologies, a somewhat blurred notion in accounting for the multiple identities that make up the United States and the world at large as a site of mixed interactive engagement. Literally, ownership of the English language by some nations turns to defeat the idea of World Englishes in terms many nations have repurposed English to suit their own socio-cultural situations, which reminds me of my own implicit learning of Spanish in a Netflix series I have been watching for the past two months. The series (locked up) has subtitles in English, but I decided to keep up the watch with the Spanish translation. I unconsciously picked up some Spanish words and sentences. It was quite an inductive learning process for me as these Spanish patterns started permeating my conversations with friends who read Spanish at ISU. We are all users of multiple and complicated Englishes. I believe that translanguaging is a useful pedagogy that would not dissociate multilingual students from their own community and culturally rooted communicative practices. As writing teachers and participants situated in culturally diverse communities of practice, our teaching practices should be aligned to appreciating the diversity of English as a world language and the uniqueness of its emerging varieties across cultures. This will help our students to navigate learning and writing using their home literacies and languages as transit points to competencies in the target language.

One of the new ideas I encountered about writing is the idea of multimodal literacies, which I believe is grounded in translingual approaches to teaching and learning. I had heard of multimodality as a term in my communication skills course as a first-year student.

My foundational understanding of multimodality is how humans communicate across different modes (aural, spatial, digital, alpha-numeric), but I did not know it could be implemented as a teaching/mediational tool in a writing class. I had a monomodal perspective where the text is the primal focus of the writing experience. As a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the department of English at ISU, I began to have a considerable pedagogical shift in multimodality in terms of how multimodal writing is not just "different" from text-based writing instead, it can change how we write anything, how we think, as well as how we see ourselves as writers writing from the restrictive and rigid perspectives to a more open ideology about writing. I also began to see how multimodality is closely knit with culturally responsive pedagogy. Montenegro, E., & Jankowski, N. A. (2017) mention that culturally responsive pedagogy is one of the ways of ensuring equity and “validating different types of learning and evidence of learning over others, can hinder the validation of multiple means of demonstration can reinforce within students the false notion that they do not belong in higher education” (p. 5). My experiences as a graduate student index that one of the goals of multimodality is to help students to be rhetorically attuned to other modes of writing. My experience with encouraging multimodal literacies in my classroom is that this approach helps teachers to understand how students compose and construct meaning from resources available to them. Also, when teachers use multimodality as a means for students to represent their knowledge, teachers should not be focused on the final product or final artifact students produce, but they should also be focused on the process because tracking their artifact-making processes acts as a kind of a level of self-assessment allows you as a teacher to account for their positionality, the literate processes involved in creating the artifact, their progress and their diverse backgrounds. Canagarajah (2006)

mentions that rather than being concerned about the products of multilingual writing, we should be concerned about the process involved in shuttling between two or more languages. Paying attention to the processes helps to articulate what is happening, why they made the choices, what tools they used (and what the limitations of those tools are), as well as how their genre knowledge changed (or not). Multimodality offers students the opportunity to function well as rhetors. Canagarajah (2019) also argues that “transnational identities require a translingual mode of representation” (p. 55). Adopting a multimodal approach helps students to situate their writing in recognizable social contexts rather than a rule-bound system of writing which stifles innovation. Thinking through this as a writer makes me appreciate how innovative it will be to represent writing in other semiotic tools. From the pedagogical perspective, some students are able to learn or socialize with texts that give them a picturesque sense of the world. Knowing our students’ identities in terms of how they learn/grasp concepts (visual, tactile, etc.) is also a way of being culturally sensitive to their learner identities. Students are able to remember their writing and reading experiences better in different modes of writing.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed in detail my academic literacy socialization practices as a transnational graduate student in the US, highlighting my multilingual identity through my discursive voice strategies and experiences as a newcomer in US graduate. In the next and final chapter, I discuss the practical and theoretical implications of this autoethnographic study of my writing identity as a transnational graduate student in a U.S. graduate program and suggest possible directions for future research. The last chapter provides pedagogical insights, suggestions, and discussions that could contribute to how transnational graduate student writing can be perceived in L2 writing contexts.



## CHAPTER V: PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This autoethnographic study focused on my lived experiences as a Ghanaian student pursuing an MA degree in the U.S. by utilizing stories and evidentiality (corpus from my graduate school papers) as self-reflective epistemologies to understand my linguistic and social adjustments as well as my academic literacy socialization practices in a US academic discourse community. The

study responded to the following research questions: a. How do I develop a writerly voice in academic writing? b. What are some of the challenges and affordances I meet as I engage in writing for graduate school as an Akan speaker of English? c. What are some of the shifts in my writing pedagogy as a graduate student in the US? In this chapter, I discuss how the findings of this study can influence pedagogical practices of helping international graduate students and writers with dual language dexterities to navigate their writing in a complex ‘English world.’

Contributing to scholarship on the academic socialization of transnational graduate students in the US, this chapter will keenly provide key recommendations for institutional practice in the context of higher education.

### **Overview of Findings in Light of Existing Research**

The findings of this study resonate with other studies on international graduate writers and issues of voice in the field of TESOL and Applied Linguistics (Hirvela and Belcher, 2001; Hyland, 2001; 2008; Ivanic and Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001). In light of the findings of this study, I found that I had an already existing writing voice prior to my experiences with academic writing in a US graduate school. In a similar fashion, some scholars in the field of Applied Linguistics mentioned above made several arguments that support the idea that multilingual writers come with established voice and writing identities in transnational contexts of higher education. For instance, Matsuda (2001) argues that the notion of voice is not a new concept to the “collectivist cultures” (p. 35).

The assertion by Matsuda (2001) also corroborates the arguments by Hirvela & Belcher (2001) that multilingual writers are not voiceless writers. Hirvela & Belcher (2001) further argue that multilingual writers bring into their graduate education established and formidable identities in their cultures as well as trajectories of success in their academic and professional lives. Hirvela & Belcher (2001) argue that voice is not something to be taught and acquired, but rather a tool to understand the nuanced experiences that characterize the transition from L1 and L2 writing. Hirvela & Belcher (2001), in their study of the voices of multilingual writers, report the cases of three case studies of three professional multilingual writers that illustrate the propensity for L2 writing education and research to ignore the voices or identities that L2 writers already possess. In the case study, Fernando, who was admitted to the Ph.D. program in a US university, was placed in the university's ESL writing course. He was an established associate professor in Venezuela who had published in Spanish over 40 scientific research papers in his field. He had dilemmas with being put on a tangent as a mere graduate student, and he described it as a "matter of confidence" (p .92). The transition from an established professor to a doctoral student meant he was no longer able to use the Spanish language which he had used to publish his research papers. What multilingual writers with such profound dexterities and histories of success in writing will need is an acknowledgment in their new locus of studies-an acknowledgment that does not besmirch their identities as successful writers in various contexts because one might have some experience with writing in another context but that does not automatically mean that they are necessarily successful writers in all contexts. Devaluing the writing histories of experienced multilingual writers in new environments puts them in the position of toddlers in the writing situation where they need to be scaffolded. Seloni's (2014) case study of a Columbian artist who was a graduate student in the US shows how self-mention is an important discursive strategy to exert voice in one's writing. Through this study, Seloni (2014) found out that the use of self-

mentions in Jacob's writing elucidated his writer visibility and recognition identity as well as his relationship with the audience of his thesis, emphasizing self-mention as an important facet of multilingual writing.

Like Jacob in Seloni's (2014) study, the findings of this autoethnography study showed how self-mention accounted for my agency and identity as a multilingual writer. The problem of a lack of attention on voice-related pedagogy may be that most students and teachers may be unaware of the role of voice in academic writing and how voice significantly accounts for writer agency (Hyland, 2008) which needs to be attended to. This study also confirmed that academic literacy socialization is nuanced, collaborative, and dialogic. Seloni (2012) extensively explores the academic socialization practices of six multilingual doctoral students studying in US graduate programs, where she reveals that the academic socialization practices of multilingual students are nuanced and multilayered. She demonstrated through her study that Nonnative English-speaking graduate students dwell on outside collaborative networks to navigate not just how to 'do graduate school' but how various interactive dialogues usher them into becoming legitimate members of their disciplinary orientations in new discourse communities. Several other studies in the area of academic socialization also demonstrated these findings; Zappa-Hollman (2007) emphasizes that academic socialization is a communal activity where collaboration is very important for multilingual students to succeed in their academic environment. Similarly, with regard to the importance of collaboration as an academic literacy socialization practice, Belcher (1994) emphasizes that apprenticeship and mentorship scaffold new/novice members in an academic community with the needed materials to be successful in their academic trajectory.

As the subject of this study, I found out that my success in a US graduate school was not only by my own individual effort; rather, an academic relationship and networking with both senior and junior members of my department helped me to thrive academically. A snapshot of the findings of

this study in relation to what has been done in the field gives substance to this current study since it teases out similar intricacies of multilingual writing.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

From my experience as a graduate student in the United States and by dint of being situated in this study as the fulcrum under which all these discussions and findings are centered, I discuss the following central pedagogical implications that this study promulgates.

### **Teaching Value in Multilingual Language Characteristics**

A pivotal concern of this thesis is a call targeted at rethinking and rewriting the narratives on linguistic racism and linguistic justice. In response to the monolingual ideologies in academic writing in the English-speaking world, it is unequivocal that multilingual writers face a lot of pressure when it comes to hiding their linguistic identities or variations to conform to the norm. Multilingual writers are sometimes made ashamed of their writing styles. It is important to decolonize academic writing because marking idiosyncratic differences in writing and other linguistic peculiarities as non-standard is detrimental to building writer confidence in writers or students who are considered to have dual language competencies. As L2 writers and teachers, we must teach multilingual students and L1 speakers of English the value of having dual language competencies and multiliteracies; this means teaching to discard deficit perceptions of being bilingual and having deep discussions on the heterogenous nature of language usage. This study provided me with a space to “talk back” at institutions with monolithic and monolingual perspectives about the use and appropriation of the English language, especially within the context of US education. Some scholars in this realm of monolithic ideas about the use of the English language arrogate to themselves the power to mark languages of L2 writers and students as mistakes; therefore, this thesis is an opportunity to self-advocate to value and valorize the unique linguistic make-up of multilingual writers.

By advocating value in multilingual literacies, we will give credence and reverberate minoritized students groups whose languages and language practices have been misappropriated, undermined, or deemed illegitimate amidst the pluralistic nature of communication, social interaction, and engagements in the United States.

### **Explicit Teaching of Voice as an Important L2 Pedagogy**

Explicit instruction on voice in writing is important because taking voice out of the writing equation is telling students to rip off their agency and power as important constituents of writing. As scholars in the field (Matsuda, 2001) have argued, the discursive strategies of voice may be realized in different cultures differently. I believe it is important that we enact visible pedagogy where students are explicitly taught how voice is realized in English. In support of the nuanced nature of voice in L2 writing, Matsuda & Tardy (2007) also establish that “it may be useful to consider the development of voice as one strand of the complicated process of discourse acquisition” (p. 246). In the absence of explicit instruction on voice, we assume that students already know how voice is realized in the target language, even though such students may come to classrooms with implicit writer agency. Explicit instruction on voice is also important because voice-related discussions are not always present because we do not always see “anything personal/subjective”-related as a valuable aspect of social sciences and humanities, but in reality, reflexivity is one aspect of writing that we should be paying more attention as we cannot separate personal from the social or economic.

## **Genre Education in L2/Multilingual Countries**

From my experience as a graduate student in the US from Ghana, I shared narratives in this study on my antecedent knowledge of genres that seemingly made it difficult to understand how it was being conceptualized in the US. Tardy et al. (2018) mention that many Graduate Teaching Assistants come into US writing classrooms having unfamiliar knowledge about genres which breeds resistant approaches to genre pedagogies.

Similarly, Schenider (2018) states that the rhetorical reality of juggling new writing conventions can be hard for international students since their writing is embedded in a new culture. In light of these findings, I believe there should be intensive genre ‘education’ in both L2 and L1 contexts because, for many writers in some L2 contexts, it is hard to transition from many writing instructors whose home countries do not have a focus on writing education in their teacher training programs. Understanding genre pedagogy before transitioning into US classrooms will help bridge the anxieties of being a Graduate Teaching Assistant as well as help new graduate students in US English programs to adapt quickly to classroom genre instruction and pedagogy.

## **Departmental Support for International Students**

From my experiences of schooling in the US for two years, I believe that the departments that host many international students must provide enough support in the form of intensive in-person orientations, cohort meetings for graduate instructors as well as weekly check in on all graduate teaching assistants to ascertain their academic and instructional ‘wellness.’ I discussed in the previous chapter how reticence and anxiety might prevent international students from seeking support; as such, it would be very valuable and supportive to have check-in systems at the departmental level that will work on the academic well-being of international students. Considering the burgeoning number of international students in the US (Matsuda,2006; Schneider,2018; Mahalingappa et. al, 2021), it has become expedient to have formidable institutional support for international students. My academic

socialization practices index how institutional support is crucial in helping international students to navigate their literate activities properly. One of my research questions interrogates the resources and spaces available for international students to enact their biliterate practices in US graduate programs. This question seeks to address and echo institutional readiness to provide arduous help to international students to thrive in their new educational environment.

Mahalingappa et. al (2021) emphasize institutional and faculty readiness to support linguistically diverse students as an essential caveat in helping multilingual students to thrive in their discourse communities.

The various academic departments in US graduate schools should liaise with the international student services to constantly inform and orient international students to fully engage with resources and institutional spaces within their new academic community. Another important role of the academic departments and the ISSS is to have enough linguistic information (level of competency in English, their first language histories) to ascertain better the linguistic needs that will help them succeed in US graduate programs. Assumptions about their linguistic characteristics can be detrimental since multilingual students have different linguistic histories and proficiencies (Schneider, 2018).

### **Breaking Reticence in International Students**

Most international students may have feelings of reticence in terms of asking the necessary questions from experienced members of their new academic discourse communities, often due to factors such as being new to the academic disciplines and linguistic, cultural, racial, and intellectual marginalization they face in their new environments. International students must know that asking for help or seeking academic support will not be considered a sign of unintelligence or inexperience by personnel within their academic community; as such, they must ask all the necessary questions to fully engage with academic spaces and resources in their graduate school journey. Academic literacy socialization as situational and dialogic, as asserted by Seloni (2012), means that newcomers should

engage in healthy academic conversations with senior members through email exchanges, out of class talks which ground newcomers in conventions of their disciplines as well as access to various academic spaces (library, cohorts, counseling services) in times of need.

### **Encouraging Reflexive Studies in the Field**

Since one of the crucial goals of this study is to contribute to the body of scholarship and pedagogy around critical multilingualism in higher education, which aims to recognize the legitimacy and value of people who communicate with a multitude of linguistic repertoires, it is important to emphasize and encourage autoethnographic works from students and writers from minority populations. There is a steady growth of research in reflexivity in the field of TESOL and Applied linguistics ( Canagarajah,2019; Kubota, 2020; 2022; Pavlenko, 2002; 2007) These studies emphasized reflexivity as a value epistemology for research where the personal is important for understanding other social dimensions of knowledge; also, these studies (expands our understanding of research as broad and intricate where integration of hybrid discourse/alternative discourse in terms of knowledge production are valid).

However, we do not always get to read such works from international/multilingual students. The field of applied linguistics needs more voices within the novice membership to bring out powerful narratives that elucidate the uniqueness of multilingual writing. Reflexivity has become an important tool in Applied Linguistics for learning about people's cultural ways of being, Pavlenko (2002; 2007) mentions that there is much value in reflexivity in academic contexts because narratives are rich sources of data in studying people's lived experiences. As a budding scholar in the field, I want to use this thesis to create a safe and brave space for international students to represent their knowledge and practices in academic scholarship. Self-knowledge may exist as an invaluable epistemology by some scholars, and understanding the discursive literate practices of graduate international students through autoethnographic studies is essential in valorizing indigenous voices as well as racial minority



populations. The academia's obsession with objectivity is an epistemological problem that needs to be addressed. Kubota (2020; 2022) demonstrates how, in disciplinary writing, epistemological racism privileges certain kinds of knowledge production as valid and others as invalid (self-representation, reflexivity accounts, etc.). To Kubota, these types of research are somewhat sub-standard because they are seen as subjective studies, while academia is obsessed with neutrality that suppresses the agency of the writer.

### **Directions for Future Work and Limitations of the Study**

Every research work has limitations, and this autoethnographic work is no exception. As part of this study, there were other lines of research that needed to be expanded on, such as racism and language and the use of pidgin in academic and non-academic writing contexts. In future academic endeavors, I would like to look at these areas from the experiences of other multilingual writers.

In terms of limitations, even though autoethnography is an asset in terms of how it helps in learning from people's embodied experiences, I believe that doing such reflective work on more students would have added to the voice represented in this work. Faculty in the field of Applied linguistics could also explore their embodied experiences as writing teachers in relation to voice, academic literacy socialization, and writing.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this autoethnographic study focused on my lived experiences as a Ghanaian student pursuing an MA degree in the U.S. by utilizing stories and evidentiality (corpus from my graduate school papers) as self-reflective epistemologies to understand my linguistic and social adjustments as well as my academic literacy socialization practices in a US academic discourse community. The study found out that academic literacy socialization of international students is intricately challenging where such students undergo raciolinguistic challenges as second language writers, writing instruction in a new educational environment is challenging because of the different

experiences international students have with writing pedagogy. Also, this study found out that academic voice is crucial in helping students to exert power in their writing as such, self-mention and reflexivity should be encouraged as 'proper' methods of knowledge construction. I believe that the findings of this study can influence pedagogical practices of helping international graduate students and writers with dual language dexterities to navigate their writing in a complex 'English world.' In the next phase of my academic endeavor, I seek to get greater insights into other L2 writers' experiences and writing strategies as well as genre pedagogy.

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## APPENDIX A: CORPUS FROM GRADUATE SCHOOL TEXTS

### Hedges

- a. Some students *may* be graded unfairly; I have learned to appropriately grade students in smaller quantities. (ENG 402, Teaching Composition)
  
- b. There are some impeding factors that *could* impact the writing of students from translingual backgrounds. (ENG 402, Teaching Composition)
  
- c. Though these marriages existed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Elizabethan era, it *may* have had prejudicial hatred and criticism by those who found it unsavory and unconstitutional in terms of its legitimacy. (ENG 422, Studies in Shakespeare)
  
- c. The author *may* have meant it for “exchange me for a stupid person”; a goat is normally known to be a stupid animal. (ENG 422, Studies in Shakespeare)
  
- d. Academic hierarchical systems *may* oppose translingual pedagogies.... (ENG 440, Studies in English Linguistics)
  
- e. These discursive features they draw on *may or may not* have bearings in genre orientations of constructing voice in the L2. (ENG 440, Studies in English Linguistics)
  
- f. I am not convinced of how much teachers know in terms of deploying translanguaging in their classrooms or even if they do, it is *somewhat* nuanced in its implementation in a real-life classroom context. (ENG 440, Studies in English Linguistics)

- g. It is **somewhat** inconclusive to make such arguments on the use of English in other settings.  
(ENG 341)
- h. The preponderance of such conceptualizations in learning English **could** be detrimental.  
(ENG 401, Introduction to Graduate Studies, English Language Varieties)
- i. **I do not seek** to do a literary analysis in this log, but for the purposes of this discussion....  
(ENG 341, Cross-Cultural Issues in TESOL)\
- j. ....at least to some extent enhance our understanding of **possible** connections obtaining between these two distinct types of English. (ENG 401, Introduction to Graduate Studies, Varieties of English)

### **Boosters**

- l. **Of course**, It will help scaffold activities by engaging in a ‘whole class/joint deconstruction of genres... (ENG 346, Assessment and Testing in ESL)
- m. It is **unequivocal** that students must have adequate preparation before going for a high-stake exam. (ENG 346, Assessment and Testing in ESL)
- n. The United States **unequivocally** has become an education hub for most international students. (ENG 440, Studies in English Linguistics)
- o. Students’ home literacies **should** serve as springboards for learning and writing in the target language. ((ENG 440, Studies in English Linguistics)
- p. **Nobody** has the right to stereotype other cultures; it is a myopic purview. (ENG 341, Cross-Cultural Issues in TESOL)
- q. These intricacies INFORM me that there is **certainly no** bad writing; rather, there are varying socially interconnected activities that impact how we write and uP-TaKe. (ENG 402)

- r. These choices in writing *should* be seen by rhetors as creative resources rather than erroneous forms. (ENG 401, Introduction to Graduate Studies)
- s. Female EFL learners *should* not be brainwashed that they cannot take respectable roles in society despite the textual representations they may see or encounter (ENG 341, Cross-Cultural Issues in TESOL)
- t. Rather than seeing these forms as ‘fringes’ of the native version, they **should** be looked at from a dimensional perspective of ‘acceptance’. (ENG 341, Cross-Cultural Issues in TESOL)
- u. English has become a global language; *no one* owns the language. (ENG 401, Introduction to Graduate Studies)
- v. *No one literally* owns the English language; many nations have repurposed English to suit their own socio-cultural situation. (ENG 346)
- w. There is **NO** such thing as bad English. It only exists when set within the parameters of native speakerism. (ENG 343, Cross-Cultural Issues in TESOL)
- x. We *cannot* talk about Africa without mentioning racism which was deeply rooted in colonialism. (ENG 343, , Cross-Cultural Issues in TESOL)
- y. We *cannot* say that we value our students in our classroom while we pay no heed to what embodies them (their cultures). (ENG 346, Assessment and Testing in ESL)
- z. We **must** avoid classroom tasks that stifle fluidity and innovation (ENG 346, Assessment and Testing in ESL)
- a. Teachers *must not* see this as lack of familiarity with the idea of voice (ENG 440, Studies in English Linguistics)
- b. The hefty impact of composition's exclusion *must* be looked at critically from the narrative (ENG 401, Introduction to Graduate Studies)

- c. Though, Davydova (2012) in this article establishes clear confines of the ecology of these varieties, which will serve as reference scholarly material for my thesis on *the emerging educated Ghanaian English*, I **disagree** with her stance on these varieties in (p. 377) (ENG 401)
- d. As I engage with the literature on the place of English in Ghana, I **disagree** with scholars like Sey (1973), and Gyasi (1990) on their view of these forms as deviances from the native variety

### Attitude markers

- e. The issue of racial stereotyping in EFL textbooks is **quite interesting**. (ENG 341, Cross-Cultural Issues in TESOL)
- f. The **interesting** thing is that they all mentioned that they make necessary tweaks to the lesson from these gauges. (ENG 346, Assessment and Testing in ESL)
 

The most **interesting** thing is that she uses reading and writing as complementary literacies. (ENG 440, Studies in English Linguistics)
- g. I **believe** these “male narratives” had the better part of giving sustainable ideas to help the department, but they failed at it. (ENG 401)
- h. This, I **believe**, would avoid unnecessary and over-extensive glossing of words that carry tones of race. (ENG 422, Studies in Shakespeare)
- i. Such an ideology, I **believe**, is inconsistent and inaccurate in accounting for the language socialization practices and distinct rhetorical practices of linguistically diverse students. (ENG 440)
- j. The tag “English wives” (p.15) is **nauseating** to a woman who has the same level of graduate qualification as the man she is married to but not given the opportunity as a result of her gender. (ENG 401)

- k. After reading this text, I ***felt really bad*** because these representations were not only misleading but also made me feel alienated from the text. (ENG 343)
- l. Translanguaging is therefore ***not benign*** to learning English after all.... (ENG 440)
- n. The textual glossing of the phrase *lascivious Moor* is a ***very benign*** and comprehensive act of construction of race by the This is ***very benign*** to multilingual students as it only captures what students..... (ENG 346)
- o. I must admit that I am ***very happy*** that the issue of accountability is being talked about in this section of the course. (ENG 346, Assessment and Testing in ESL)
- p. I was ***surprised*** at the depth of linguistic repertoires these students deployed to navigate their learning of English. (ENG 346, Assessment and Testing in ESL)

### **Self-Mention**

- d. Culture, ***in my thinking***, is motivation driven; People have motivation for practicing what exists in their cultures. (ENG 346)
- e. **I** believe that it is inconsistent and inaccurate in accounting for the language socialization practices and distinct rhetorical practices of linguistically diverse students. (ENG 440)
- f. Though the men in the text are seen as powerful, **I argue** that, in an unusual way, that women are inarguably ‘SHE roes’..... (ENG 341)
- g. **I** also think teachers constitute a larger part of the socialization of students aside parents (ENG 341)
- h. **I** disagree with scholars like Sey (1973), and Gyasi (1990) in their view of these forms as deviances from the native variety. (ENG 401)

- i. Such postulations, *in my view*, are inactive and partly “needless” in the discourse that centers on remedies to the frailties of English studies as an academic discipline. (ENG 401)
- j. **As a student-teacher and budding scholar in the field of TESOL, I** am open to getting comprehensible insights into what experienced teachers do in diverse classrooms (ENG 440)
- k. **In my personal argument, I** believe his stance on the profession of English teaching is very profound and true as he points out the ignorance, goal-oriented mishaps, and the fumbling nature of teachers of English. (ENG 401)

## ENGAGEMENTS

### Reader mention

- l. In as much as **we** advocate for such a practice, **we** as teachers may not have linguistic competencies in all the languages, which I think is daunting... (ENG 440)
- m. To say that **we** know exactly what Shakespeare means or meant in his writing of Othello can be a very hard decision because the underlying fact is that **we** were all not there at the time Shakespeare made those linguistic choices to write his texts. (ENG 422)
- n. **We** must be as open as the word OPEN when it comes to issues of culture and make necessary adjustments to them. (ENG 341)
- o. **We** cannot talk about Africa without mentioning racism which was deeply rooted in colonialism (ENG 343)



APPENDIX B:GABRIEL'S MOST FREQUENTLY USED TERMINOLOGIES

|                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Embodied experience   | Discourse Communities    |
| Transnational Writing | Reflexive Writing        |
| Literacy Development  | Academic Spaces          |
| Writerly Voice        | Metalinguistic Awareness |
| Linguistic Repertoire | Genre                    |
| Dynamic               | Affordance               |
| Translingual Practice | Novice Writers           |