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**A COMPARISON OF AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND AN IMMIGRANT STUDENT: EXPERIENCES WITH SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING**

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**Abstract**

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This study is a comparison of an immigrant student and international student's experiences with L2 writing acquisition. The study examines a teacher of a basic writing course at a community college in the US and two of the students in the class. The students are one female Korean student who attended high school in Korea, and one male Korean student who attended high school in the US. To explore these issues, this study utilized a modified version of analytic induction and a combination of qualitative methods. The findings indicate that some differences exist between the two students. Some of these differences might be explained by using Bourdieu's concept of *linguistic habitus*. The study concludes by suggesting that teachers acknowledge students' feelings about literacy acquisition, and that it is vital to develop more principled student assessments.

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Most writing programs in post-secondary contexts are not designed to meet the linguistic and educational needs of immigrant students who have graduated from US high schools. According to census statistics, 16% of school age children speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998, as cited in Valdés, 2001). Some researchers believe that this percentage may actually even be higher. Harklau, Losey, and Siegal (1999) note that it is extremely difficult to estimate the number of students who speak languages other than English in US educational institutions. They point out that students are only included in these statistics if they are designated in the schools as "limited English proficient" (LEP). This designation is usually representative of only lower proficiency levels. Students routinely continue to develop academic language skills well after they are no longer officially considered LEP. These numbers indicate that it is vital to develop programs in secondary and post-secondary contexts that address the needs of immigrant students.

This is an important topic because very little attention has been given to immigrant students in post-secondary contexts and it is necessary to address their needs because educators are becoming aware that programs often fail to successfully provide them with appropriate instruction. Universities often do not have explicit procedures or policies that address the differing needs of immigrant students and international students. In this situation, bilingual or multilingual immigrant students may be placed in English as a second language programs targeted to international students, or in programs for monolingual English background students. These students often do not receive appropriate instruction when this happens, so it is crucial that post-secondary institutions begin to address this population so that policies can be implemented that direct the development of programs and teaching practices that address these students.

The purpose of this study is to compare the literacy experiences of international and immigrant students. These two groups of students have different educational backgrounds because international students complete all of their formal education in their home countries before coming to the US. Immigrant students leave their home countries after attending some school and then complete their educations in the US. I developed an interest in this topic through my own experiences as an ESL teacher and writing teacher. The students I have taught come from a wide variety of backgrounds. The last course I taught at a community college was made up of students from eleven different countries, both permanent residents and students planning to return home after their studies. They had been living in the US for anywhere from four months to ten years. Some of them were bilingual in English and their native languages, whereas others were still clearly in the process of acquiring English. Some of them had definite goals to pursue academic programs, while others were unsure, and still others were in the US only to improve their English. I have found that it is challenging to develop courses that meet the needs of all of

my students. Such diversity in community college classrooms is common, and it is important to examine the factors that come into play in such a complex environment, and how those factors impact teaching and learning.

I define international students as students who completed all of their formal schooling through high school, and possibly some post-secondary education, in their home countries. These students came to the United States to pursue an undergraduate or graduate degree, or for language training. Immigrant students are defined as students who came to the United States before graduating high school in their country of origin, and finished their formal education in the United States. These students immigrated to the United States for economic, political, or personal reasons. Research by Collier (1987) indicates that the time it takes to acquire second language skills depends on contexts, and age. Her findings show that immigrants who arrive during middle school or early high school (12-15 years) have the most difficulty acquiring language for academic purposes. These students are required to acquire a large amount of content knowledge as well as develop language skills in a short period of time.

This study takes place in a writing course in a post-secondary institution located in a mid-western community in the United States utilizing qualitative research methods. It uses an ecological framework as a guide to understanding the social basis of literacy. Barton (1994) describes an ecological framework as one that attempts to understand literacy as a “set of social practices” (p. 32) and how they are incorporated into other practices that are a part of cognitive and social activities. It also attempts to understand how literacy is situated in history, language and learning. This framework recognizes that the way literacy practices are valued varies depending on the social and institutional context. Barton further argues that these social practices, which are shaped by power relationships created by social and institutional structures,

impact individuals' thoughts and attitudes. This means that different types of socially constructed literacies exist, and individuals bring different pieces of their selves to the texts they create and interpret.

The ecological setting I am investigating in this study is a community college writing classroom. I hope to be able to gain some insight into how the institutional context influences the literacy practices which are valued and, therefore, taught in the writing classroom. I also hope to develop some understanding of how these practices affect students' experiences.

Barton's (1994) ideas about literacy dovetail with the Bourdieu's concepts of *cultural capital* and *linguistic habitus*. *Habitus* is the notion that individuals acquire a set of practices during childhood from the social context. These practices predispose individuals to perceive and respond to reality in specific ways that are associated with the context in which they were acquired. Although these practices are ingrained in individuals from childhood, they are malleable and individuals can adapt them to new situations (Bourdieu, 1990).

Bourdieu postulates that individuals acquire *capital* through their experiences, and that individuals function within certain areas of society through exchanges of tangible as well as *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu, 1990). *Linguistic capital* refers to the extent to which linguistic practices are valued in specific contexts and function as symbolic capital. The linguistic capital of students, especially linguistically diverse students, is often different from the symbolic capital valued in educational institutions. This means that students' prior experiences with language and literacy may not be acknowledged as valuable. Research indicates some of the ways that learners draw on their first language when developing texts in a second language (Berman, 1994; Friedlander, 1990); when their first languages and prior educational experiences are not

acknowledged and valued, it is more difficult for students to capitalize on them. I will return to the concepts of habitus, and linguistic capital in the discussion section of this paper.

## **Literature Review**

### *L2 Writing*

In order to understand the issues involved in working with L2 writers from diverse educational backgrounds it is important to have some general understanding of L2 writing. I will not provide a detailed review of work in this area; rather I will report some of the general findings that Silva (1993) notes in his review of 72 studies that investigated L2 writing, and I will also note relevant work by three other researchers.

Silva's review synthesized work that was published predominantly in the 1980s and early 1990s. Twenty-seven different language backgrounds were included, however, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish represented the majority. Most of the studies asked students to engage in English expository writing in classroom settings. He explains that although many similarities exist between L1 and L2 writing, he is focusing on differences in order to attain a deeper understanding of L2 writing as an entity unto itself. He states that the studies he reviewed reveal differences between L1 and L2 writing in composing processes, as well as in features and structures of texts. Many studies indicated that L2 students tend to spend less time planning and reviewing their work. Their essays generally received lower holistic scores compared with essays written by speakers of (mainstream) English. The studies also reveal differences in discoursal, morphosyntactic, and lexicosemantic areas as well. He explains that no theories currently exist that adequately explain L2 writing. He maintains that in light of what we currently know about L2 writing, classroom instruction can accommodate these students by providing them ample

opportunities to write, revise, and rewrite their work, each time focusing on different aspects of writing and writing processes.

Connor's (1996) work investigates L2 writing from the perspective of contrastive rhetoric, which is the study of L1 influences on L2 writing processes. One of the most significant contributions of this area to writing instruction is the idea that L2 students' writing is motivated by conventions that are part of their linguistic and educational background. I will briefly discuss two studies that exemplify this notion.

Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, and Kuehn's (1990) study examined the relationship between L1 and L2 writing and language proficiency. They found that students in their study at lower proficiency levels exhibited a weak correlation between L1 and L2 writing skills. Students at higher proficiency levels did not show any correlation between L1 and L2 writing skills. Based on their data, they claim that teachers may be able to rely on L1 relationships more reliably at lower proficiency levels. This section sheds light on L2 writing and some of the issues involved in providing effective writing instruction for L2 students. It illustrates that L2 writing is unique from L1 writing and describes some of the features and complexities of L2 writing, and it also demonstrates that it is not a monolithic entity. Many different factors influence the writing students produce, for example notions of literacy and how it is acquired is culturally determined and influenced by educational practices. L2 writing development involves the complex interaction of cognitive and social phenomena. Developing these skills is most successful when students have the opportunity to interact with literacy events in realistic contexts while building on L1 and developing L2 literacy skills. Meaningful instruction requires teachers to develop an understanding of their students' linguistic, and educational backgrounds.

### *International Students and Immigrant Students*

The primary focus of this study is to develop a greater understanding of how international students and immigrant students differ in their experiences with L2 literacy acquisition in a US post-secondary context. Part of what makes immigrant students unique is the fact that many of them are forced to interrupt their schooling when they leave their countries of origin and come to the US. Immigrant students are faced with the task of developing English language skills in social and academic settings but many of them have not yet had the opportunity to develop these advanced academic language skills in their first languages. Students who arrive in the US during middle school or high school often receive very little language assistance since ESL and bilingual education programs are less common in these settings than in elementary settings. Norton (2000) points out that research on language acquisition is very sparse in these contexts where students who have already acquired their first language are acquiring an additional language with little formal instruction. Most of the work that has been done in this area has been carried out in contexts outside of the United States. Norton points out that a great deal of the work on this topic is speculation rather than research based on empirical data.

Valdés explores how L2 students are conceptualized in college language and writing programs, and she explains how current configurations may not serve students well or could even be detrimental. According to her analysis, most programs currently divide students into four different basic groups: mainstream English-speaking students, basic writers, speakers of nonstandard varieties of English, and ESL students. She explains that this division of students does not take into account the complexity of bilingualism.

Another factor that complicates divisions of bilingual students is the length of time it takes students to fully acquire a language. The term “incipient bilingualism” (Valdés, 1992, p.



99) refers to the period during which an individual is in the process of acquiring an additional language. This is a significant stage in the US because incipient bilinguals comprise a significant portion of this society. The length this period lasts depends on various factors, such as age, and amount of exposure to the new language. “Functional bilingualism” is the term she uses to refer to individuals who are no longer acquiring a language. This stage is characterized by significant variability because not all individuals reach the same level of proficiency in the acquisition process.

Valdés (1992) suggests that the complexity of bilingualism is not incorporated into current methods of designing writing courses in post-secondary institutions. She indicates that incipient circumstantial bilinguals are often placed in ESL courses designed for international student elective bilinguals, and functional bilinguals are placed in mainstream writing courses. This is problematic because incipient bilinguals will often have very different linguistic needs than their international student counterparts in ESL courses. Furthermore, functional bilinguals may present language features that teachers of mainstream students may not understand and may consequently penalize. These students’ writing issues emerge from different sources, and different approaches are necessary for dealing with them.

Chiang and Schmida (1999) make claims about categorizing students that are similar to Valdés’s (1992) assertions. They carried out research on the interfaces between English literacy, language identity, cultural identity, and native language loss/maintenance. They administered surveys to 471 students in fourteen sections of college writing courses at a university in California. They also randomly selected twenty of the students who filled out surveys to interview for their project. The majority of the students they surveyed described themselves as bilingual, however, during interviews, they revealed that they were not fluent in their home

language, which was Chinese. The authors maintain that categories such as ESL, bilingual, and linguistic minority are not adequate for capturing the literacy, language, and cultural realities of many students.

Reid (1998) illustrates some specific features of L2 writing, and she explains that students from different backgrounds may exhibit different linguistic features in their writing. Her article explains some of the differences between immigrant students, and international students, and how these differences can impact writing. Immigrant students acquire English out of necessity from submersion in US language and culture. These students usually receive some language support, for example through pullout programs, but often they do not receive extensive, high quality language instruction. They have varying levels of bilingualism and literacy skills in their first language, depending on what age they began their education in a US school. She describes them as “ear” learners (p. 4) because they subconsciously learn vocabulary and form grammar rules through their ears by listening to the language. The result is that they have good English fluency, and they are conversant in the slang and youth culture of their peers, but their skills are limited in other areas. Their reading abilities may be impeded due to a number of factors: A limited understanding of the structure of the English language, lack of L1 literacy skills, or a lack of experience with reading. Their writing exhibits conversational qualities that likely derive from “ear-based” learning (p. 5). These students’ writing frequently contains self-developed language rules, and fossilized forms. In terms of vocabulary, they usually have a good command of idiomatic usage, but they also demonstrate some confusion with oral language.

International students generally come from relatively privileged and well-educated backgrounds, and they are literate and fluent in their first languages. Reid describes them as “eye” learners (Reid, 1998, p. 6) because they acquired English in a classroom setting principally

through their eyes, studying vocabulary, and language rules. They have highly developed knowledge and awareness of English grammar. These students often have limited oral skills due to lack of exposure to spoken language, but their reading abilities often are quite good. However, their writing abilities often are hampered because their previous experiences with English did not give them extensive practice composing in English. Their writing commonly displays transfer from their first languages, and lack of understanding about US idioms and culture.

This section has highlighted some of the inconsistencies between the realities of linguistic diversity and bilingualism and the ways that students are conceptualized in writing and language development programs. Valdés (1992) provides a thorough and perceptive analysis of complexities of bilingualism and she convincingly explains some of the ways in which current configurations shortchange students. Reid (1998) provides a fairly detailed analysis of differences between these two groups of students that arise due to differences in educational backgrounds.

Harklau has also made significant contributions to work in this area, and she has examined and compared ESL and mainstream environments in high schools. In a 3 1/2 year long ethnographic study of students in a suburban high school, Harklau (1994) conducted observations of mainstream classes and ESL classes, and interviews in order to compare ESL and mainstream learning environments. In this study, she closely examined the specific instructional and linguistic differences between these two learning environments. She found that these two contexts differed in two main ways. The first is in the organization and goals of instruction, such as how spoken and written language were used in classroom activities, how teachers' goals affected course content, and the degree to which teachers used explicit language instruction and feedback. The second area of difference was in "socializing functions of

schooling” (p. 262). In this area, her study found that opportunities for peer interaction and activities, as well as counseling, differed for ESL and mainstream students. This study highlights strengths and weaknesses of both ESL and mainstream instructional contexts. She concluded from this study that bilingual and ESL classes were often regarded as burdensome extra programs. She felt that one of the most urgent needs at the school was to “...increase mainstream practitioners’ and administrators’ awareness of and sensitivity to learner needs” (p. 268).

The literature on second language writing has focused on international students in post-secondary contexts. Researchers such as Valdés (1992), Reid (1998), and Harklau (1994) have begun to focus on the particular needs of immigrant students in writing classrooms. This study seeks to build on their work by developing a deeper understanding of the specific characteristics of immigrant students in second language writing classrooms.

### **Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this study was to explore how immigrant students’ and international students’ experiences with literacy instruction differ. I also wanted to discover whether I could find empirical evidence for any of the claims proffered by researchers who have speculated about the similarities and differences of these students. I focused this study on the process of acquiring second language writing abilities in English. In carrying out this study, I was interested in the following question:

1. What type of literacy is valued in this community college writing classroom?
2. How do students with similar linguistic backgrounds but differing educational backgrounds experience the process of acquiring advanced writing skills in a US community college?

## Research Design and Method

This research approaches the study of adolescent second language literacy from a social constructivist perspective. I investigated student experiences with literacy using the interpretive/constructivist paradigm. According to Mertens (1998) the epistemology of this paradigm posits that a multitude of realities exist that are constructed socially. She explains that this paradigm stems from a view of scientific inquiry that sees knowledge as developed through interaction between researchers and participants. The views and experiences of participants are discovered utilizing qualitative research methods that pay attention to the unique characteristics of participants and contexts.

The epistemology that forms the foundation of my approach is grounded in anthropological perspectives on inquiry. Geertz (1973) explains that ethnography is an approach to studying culture that does not have a nomothetic focus on discovering laws; rather it is an idiographic process that is interpretive and seeks to understand meanings. This view sees culture and human behavior as symbolic and their analysis consists of describing and interpreting behaviors and actions in context.

Spindler and Hammond (2000) point out the fact that anthropology is concerned with examining, describing and explaining culture, but that educational anthropology is not always chiefly geared towards cultural issues. The authors point out that ethnography has become widely used in educational research. They provide examples of key features of ethnography that may sometimes be problematic in educational contexts: observation, length of study, volume of material, and open-endedness.

Observation is often referred to as participant observation, which means that the researchers participate in the contexts they study while they also observe them. Spindler and

Hammond (2000) point out that it can be difficult to fully participate as a student or a teacher in a classroom while also making observations and taking notes. Ethnographic research is often carried out over a considerable period of time, for example one year is often considered to be the bare minimum in this type of research. Spindler and Hammond (200) suggest that it is also optimal to carry out lengthy studies in educational ethnography, but they are often much shorter than most anthropological researchers would consider appropriate. This is because researchers frequently carry out educational research in an effort to develop ways to address pressing issues in educational contexts. This results in a situation in which researchers, teachers, administrators, and policymakers demand research findings much more quickly than most ethnographic researchers would traditionally be comfortable with.

Spindler and Hammond (2000) also note that ethnographic researchers tend to collect a vast amount of data. The data is collected in the form of field notes, audiotapes, videotapes, photographs, drawings, documents, and other texts. Part of the reason for the vast amount of data results from the open-ended nature of ethnographic research. Ethnographers do not enter into inquiry projects with specific, set hypotheses in mind. This is because the aim of the research is to uncover the complex meanings of social activity from the perspectives of the participants involved. If researchers impose their own questions and categories for understanding contexts, they are at risk of losing much of the meaning that is intrinsic in contexts at a level that is not readily apparent upon initial observations.

When I conducted this study I was working under time constraints that required me to collect, analyze, and begin writing up data during a four month period. I hoped to collect more data for this study in a subsequent semester, but the participants were no longer available.

Because of these constraints that were beyond my control, this study is short by anthropological standards.

The specific method I used for this study is a version of analytic induction (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). This means that I started this research with the notion that the immigrant and international students in my study would differ in salient ways, and I used “purposeful sampling” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 65) to select participants. Due to time constraints and the number of participants in my study I did not search for counter examples in my data. I think that was not necessary for this work because one of my main goals was to look for evidence to confirm or disconfirm some of the claims made about international and immigrant students made in conceptual pieces.

### *Context*

*The school.* This study took place at a local community college with an enrollment of approximately 10,000 students. According to the school catalog, the school’s student body consists of twenty percent minority students, and five percent international students. I did not locate any data on how the school collects information about bilingual and multilingual students’ educational and linguistic backgrounds.

*The curriculum.* The course I observed, ESL 100, is a non-credit writing course for non-native speakers of English. It is a required course for students who pass or test into it by taking the COMPASS test, published by ACT. Students must pass ESL/Eng 100 before they can move to the next required course. The college has a two-course sequence of courses (ESL/Eng 200 and ESL/Eng 300) that students take after 100 if they want to pursue a degree at the college or transfer to another college or university.

Three of the writing courses at the college, 100, 200, and 300, are divided into native speaker (e.g. Eng 100, Eng 200, Eng 300), and ESL sections (e.g. ESL 100, ESL 200, ESL 300). The students in Eng and ESL sections are supposed to cover similar topics and develop similar writing skills in these classes. The ESL sections were created so that students whose primary language is not English would have opportunities to deal with language and culture issues, that students in the Eng sections likely would not need help with.

The 100 classes are intended for students who have little experience with, or little confidence in expressing themselves in academic writing. Some faculty conceptualize it as a developmental writing course. Students place into ESL 100 in two main ways. Many of the students move into that class after having studied in the college's intensive English program. Other students test into the class after having their writing evaluated by the Compass test. After successfully completing the course, many of the students will progress to ESL 200 and then to ESL 300. ESL 200 emphasizes critical analysis, and engagement with the ideas of authors in essays of 3-5 pages in length and 1-2 longer essay. ESL 300 focuses on research skills, and writing research papers.

Most of the students in the Eng courses progress through the three-course sequence. However, the ESL students are more diverse, so they do not always intend to take all three courses. Some of the students in the course were there only to improve their overall English abilities, some planned to return to their home countries after completing a degree program, and still others intended to stay in the US after they completed their studies. I believe that this diversity is an integral part of teaching English language learners, and that a large number of college classes represent such a wide array of educational backgrounds and goals.



*ESL 100.* According to the syllabus for this class, the goal is to help students prepare for ESL 200, the next course in the writing sequence, and to help students with their writing for their other classes. The class met for fifty minutes four times a week. Each week, the class met twice in a traditional classroom, and twice in a computer classroom. The class consisted of eight male and eight female students. The languages represented in the class and the number of students who spoke each of them is as follows: 10 Korean, 2 Spanish, 1 Arabic, 1 Japanese, 1 Portuguese, 1 Urdu.

### ***Participants***

Two students in the class and their teacher were the participants for this study. I use pseudonyms to refer to all three of the participants in order to keep their identities confidential.

*Focal students.* I chose two students to be focal students for this study. I used “purposeful sampling” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 65) to select participants, which means that I used specific criteria in determining which students in the class to invite to participate in my study. I selected these students because they are from the same linguistic background, they are similar ages, and they graduated from high school in different countries.

- Young is a male student who is a native speaker of Korean. He immigrated to the United States with his family when he was in high school. The semester that I conducted this study was his first semester at the college. He plans to transfer to a university after he completes 1-2 years of study at the community college.

- Delia is a female student who is a native speaker of Korean. The semester I conducted this study was her first semester at the college. Before coming to this community college, she had never traveled outside of Korea. She plans to return to Korea in the summer after she completes one year at the community college.

*Teacher.* Jane is the teacher of this course. She has been teaching for more than 15 years, and she has taught at this community college for over 10 years. She has a doctoral degree in English literature. She is the supervisor for the ESL composition courses, and most of her teaching experience at this college has been with English language learners in composition classrooms. Jane is a friend of mine who I met when I taught ESL composition at the college.

### ***Data Collection***

Data collection for this study consisted of a variety of qualitative methods suggested and described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998): classroom observations, fieldnotes, interviews, and documents. I conducted two fifty-minute observations that were manually recorded in the form of handwritten field notes. The first observation gave me a general sense of the class and some of the issues that I might further pursue. After that observation I determined the focal students for the study, and I focused on them during the second observation.

I carried out one interview with each of the focal students and the teacher. Each of the interviews was recorded and transcribed. The interviews with Delia and the teacher both lasted approximately 40 minutes, and the interview with Young lasted approximately 15 minutes. The interviews with the students were conducted in classrooms on the college campus, and the interview with the teacher was conducted in her home. I also had several informal conversations with the teacher, which I included as data in this study. Additionally, I collected a variety of documents for this study: the course packet, which included the handouts and assignments for the classes I observed, and one course paper written by each of the students.

### ***Data Analysis***

I analyzed the fieldnotes of the classroom observations by writing observer comments, and interpretive commentaries after typing my notes and reading them. The interviews were

analyzed by reading them and coding them using categories that I developed from my preexisting theories based on relevant literature. The coding categories for the student interviews were: culture, educational background, learning English, writing, other (outside school, etc.). The coding categories for the teacher interview were: teaching at the community college, teaching writing in ESL 100, ESL pedagogy, teaching style, ways of thinking about students. I also read the interview transcripts looking for themes that emerged that I had not anticipated. I developed brief narratives of each of the participants that integrated the themes that emerged from the coded data. I searched for similarities and differences between the students, as well as relationships among the student and teacher interviews, the observation fieldnotes, and the documents.

### **Findings**

I have organized the findings of this study by presenting narratives of each of the participants that illustrate the major themes that emerged.

#### *Young*

Young explained that he rarely writes in Korean since he has lived in the US, and he did not talk extensively about writing in Korean when he was in Korea. He believes his strength in writing in English is his ability to put himself in the mindset of an American writer and reader. He says that he developed this ability through his experiences reading extensively in English in a US high school. One of the most salient aspects of Young was that he talked a lot about audience awareness and the importance of understanding the assumptions that readers make about writing because of their cultural backgrounds. He says his weakness is in making his writing cohesive and that his sentence structures are “all messed up”. Jane made similar comments about his writing. She said that his writing looks more like an L1 English basic writer than an L2 writer

because the content is not always well-developed, but it has the general structure of an academic essay.

When Jane was talking about her students, she mentioned that Young, “did some high school in the US.” She said that Young was in an English 100 class, but he moved to the ESL 100 class because “he had ESL errors.” It really struck me when Jane said, “...in terms of structure and development he’s got more typically young American student problems...”, and “...he has still got ESL grammar errors, a few syntax errors, but as far as the structure and development go, it doesn’t look like an ESL paper”. At first blush, it seems that this student may be better suited for the English class since Jane said that one of her primary goals in the ESL class is to teach the students about US academic rhetoric, which is not done “...In an English class (because) they’ve had that basic essay structure all through junior high and high school, but the ESL students have not”.

### *Delia*

Delia placed into the ESL 100 class after she took the college-wide writing placement test. Although she says she does not believe she received high quality writing instruction in Korea, she likes to write in her L1 and she considers herself a good writer. She mentioned that reading is a big part of writing, and she said that she is a fast and good reader in English. She also mentioned that she knows grammar rules very well. She said that her biggest stumbling block in writing is using vocabulary appropriately. Jane mentioned that Delia tends to write short papers with good ideas that she often does not elaborate on. During our conversation about writing, Delia talked quite a bit about feelings of homesickness and culture shock. She even indicated that she had lost a lot of her interest in studying English, she said, “I hate to study

English very much because I'm homesick." She also said, however, that "we should know the American style of writing."

### *Jane*

Jane's main goal is to teach the students how to write papers appropriate for a US academic context. This goal can be illustrated by her comment that "...ESL writers need to be taught more about the conventions of US academic rhetoric, little things like, you put the thesis at the end...you do a deductive rather than an inductive reasoning". She also stated that the most important thing for ESL students to know is "what American readers expect". Her syllabus states that the course is going to prepare students for the next writing course at the college, as well as help them with the writing in their other classes. It also states that the students will be learning to use the rhetorical styles that are associated with an American-style academic essay. Her syllabus shows that she recognizes that there are cultural differences in writing conventions, but it also uncritically accepts the US style. She talked about very specific aspects of US academic writing, such as putting the thesis statement at the beginning. She noted that it is important for students to learn this style because "American readers want that...they don't want to have to sort through and figure out what is being said.

### *Student Essays*

The essays the students gave me were both final drafts that had been through at least one cycle of teacher feedback and revisions. I found out that Delia also made further revisions based on the teacher comments before she gave her paper to me. Both of the papers were written on the topic of consumerism, and they were very similar in organizational structure and rhetorical styles. They did not exhibit major differences in grammatical and vocabulary usage.

## Discussion

The students in this study have the same L1, but they attended high school in different countries, and they appeared to experience L2 literacy acquisition in some different ways. Reid (1998) wrote that immigrant students may be conversant in the culture of their peers, but their writing may display self-developed and/or fossilized forms. Young's comments about culture and his writing weaknesses seem to corroborate these claims.

Reid (1998) also claims that immigrant students may have more limited skills in reading than international students. This is because immigrant students' educations may have been interrupted so they may not have opportunities to fully develop their reading abilities in their L1. Young's awareness of audience and his understanding of relationships between reading and writing do not support this claim. Delia says that she is an excellent reader, which lends some support to the theorist's ideas.

Reid (1998) argues that international students often have highly developed knowledge of English grammar; however, their writing abilities may be limited because they have not had extensive opportunities to compose in English. Delia's comment that she knows English well supports the first idea, and the teacher's comment that Delia often writes short, unelaborated papers supports the second claim.

These findings support some of the research and conceptual pieces I discussed in the literature review and they also contradict some of them. It may be useful to consider Bourdieu's notion of language habitus to understand why differences in writing exist between these two students. These two students have been acquiring literacy skills in very different ecological systems for a number of years. That is, Young has been in the United States and Delia has been in Korea. Delia and Young acquired many of their literacy practices in settings that promoted

writing for different audiences and different purposes. These “habits” become ingrained at a young age, which can make them difficult to change. This difficulty arises from the fact that the nature of the habitus is that it is a routine way of perceiving, organizing, and reacting to reality that seems completely natural. They are habits that reside at an subconscious level so they are difficult to bring to a conscious level. Since Young came to the United States when he was still in high school, he may have still been acquiring the habits that would count as linguistic capital for functioning in academic and other contexts in Korea that required advanced literacy skills. He began acquiring these habits that he could use as linguistic capital in the US context at the same time that his counterparts of the same age were acquiring these habits in English around him. This could account for Young’s apparent ease with putting himself in the mindset of an American reader/writer. It could also explain Delia’s sense of culture shock and homesickness when she discussed the difficulty she has with writing in English.

Valdés (1992) points out that bilingual immigrant students who are still in the process of acquiring English, may be placed in courses for native speakers of English, or courses for international students. She claims that both of these situations ignore the realities of these students’ linguistic and educational backgrounds, and they do not receive effective instruction. It seems that Young may be receiving writing instruction on topics that he is already familiar with, and he may possibly not be receiving the instruction that would actually be most beneficial for him now. I think it is especially ironic because Jane said that students “are convinced that perfect grammar will solve all of life’s problems”, but that as a teacher she feels that it “will come eventually, that is not the most important thing.” I see a disjuncture here because she is saying that grammar is not important and rhetorical conventions are, but they decided to move Young,

whose writing looks like a typical American student in terms of rhetorical conventions, but it exhibits non-native grammatical features.

Jane's talk about the type of writing that she does in her class illustrates the type of literacy that is valued in this community college writing classroom. American academic-style rhetoric is valued over any other type of literacy. In her class, she recognized that her students may use very different styles, but she did not show in any way that she valued the linguistic capital that students already possessed, and she did not show that she built on it in the classroom. Young seems that he is able to fit in well with this type of classroom because of his previous experiences in a US high school where he was inculcated with the linguistic habitus that is common in this setting. Delia, on the other hand, gave indications that it was difficult for her to adjust to this setting because she was feeling distress, homesickness, and culture shock. She explained that she used to love studying English, but at the time of the interview she did not.

I think that Young's experience with being moved from Eng 100 to ESL 100 further exemplifies the literacy practices that are valued in this setting. It seems that the dominant rhetoric is that academic writing that conforms to the expectations of college professors is the most valuable type of literacy. In addition to the structure of writing, the form of the writing, and the extent to which the grammar of the writing conforms to standard American English is also highly valued. In fact, Young's situation demonstrates that the grammatical forms of the writing are even more important than the content of the writing and the way that it is organized.

The student essays I collected further show the values and literacy practices that dominate this classroom. As I pointed out in the findings section, both of the essays were very similar. They conformed to a basic structure of academic essays that describes a problem, takes a stance on it, and provides evidence and support for a stance with statistics, and quotes from



authorities. I had hoped to see more differences between the essays, and I probably would have if I had collected earlier drafts, or first drafts. Since these were final drafts, they had both undergone the same process of being shaped by the teacher's commentary so that they conformed in the same way to the idea of an "American academic essay" that conforms to an American reader's expectations.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation of this study is the fact that I did not collect a large amount of data. If circumstances had allowed for it, I would have done follow up interviews to further explore issues that arose in the interview, and probed for more information and detail about the participants' perspectives so that I could be more confident about my conclusions. This would have been especially important with Young since his interview had to be cut short because of time constraints. I also think that the student essays would have been more useful in my analysis if I had collected all the drafts as well as the final version of the essays. That way I would have been able to see what kind of writing the students produced on their own and how their writing was shaped by teacher commentary.

### **Research and Educational Implications**

This was an initial study on the topic of immigrant students' and international students' experiences with L2 writing acquisition. It shows that some differences between these students exist, and it is important to further pursue these issues. More research is needed that systematically explores the experiences of these students and the relationship of their experiences to their personal histories and institutional contexts. It is also important to do more research on the identities of these students and how their identities interact with their experiences with

literacy acquisition. Researchers need to investigate how teachers understand the diversity of their students and how they attempt to provide effective instruction for all of their students.

I think this study also points to some areas for composition teachers to consider when teaching L2 composition. One of the most fundamental areas is the need to obtain as much information as possible about students' educational backgrounds and experiences with language and literacy acquisition. This knowledge can give teachers insight into understanding the writing students produce, which can help students shape their writing to express their ideas to audiences they have in mind. I think this study also highlights the importance of taking into account students' emotions and feelings about learning a new way of expressing themselves. It is one thing to acknowledge that students come from different cultures with different modes of expressions, but I think it is important to take it a step further. Since students have been utilizing habits of language for a long time, they feel a connection to them, and it may feel uncomfortable if students feel that they are giving them up for other modes of expression that feel awkward. It may help students to simply acknowledge these feelings, but they may also need to develop an awareness of how they can incorporate multiple modes of expression into their repertoires. In addition, immigrant students may not receive the type of instruction that they most need if they are placed into ESL classes only because their writing exhibits grammatical features that do not conform to standard American English. It is vital that educational institutions develop more principled ways of assessing and placing students rather than acting on assumptions about students based on their use of grammar.

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