**Beyond Cultural Identity:
Product and Processes in ESL Writing**

by

Xuemei Li

**A thesis submitted to
The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

**School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies
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and Processes in ESL Writing*

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*in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
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ABSTRACT

Cultural aspects in ESL writing are an important field to explore. To date, a great number of studies have contributed to the research of cultural differences and cultural influences on the construction of writer identity and the evolution of learner beliefs in second language writing. However, most of them have focused on analysis of cultural information in the written texts. The processes through which such texts are created, which should be a more important issue, have been ignored. This research, aimed at bridging this gap, focused on the dynamic relationship among culture, writer identity and learner beliefs with regard to the micro-process and macro-process of ESL writing. A study consisting of two cases was carried out to examine the processes by which ESL students learn to write and to present themselves effectively in writing. It has been found that the notions of culture, identity and beliefs are tightly interwoven. They interconnect and interplay, and work together to shape learner beliefs in terms of education, and of writing in particular; they also work together in the reconstruction of an ESL writer's identity, incorporating multiple influences and multiple intentions. However, the evolution of beliefs required for an ESL writer to adapt to a new learning context and to construct a new writer identity in that context is without any doubt, a daunting task. Determining effective ways to help ESL writers achieve these goals may be the direction for further research.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Culture, Identity and Belief in ESL Writing

1. Introduction

Studies relating second language writing to culture originated and developed out of research on second language learning and teaching in general. The notion of culture was introduced into the field of second language research by Fries (1945) and Lado (1957), who considered first culture as a factor influencing second language acquisition. My earliest thought of relating culture to English learning was sparked by Lado's (1957) *Linguistics Across Cultures*, which I first read ten years ago and have re-read several times since. Fries and Lado's notion of influence of a person's native or first culture on second language learning was influential at its time, and when considered in light of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Whorf, 1956), raised the issue of the relationship between language and thought across cultures. As research began to develop in the area of second language writing, this relationship between thought patterns and writing remained a central issue.

Studies on ESL writing have followed a path that started with contrastive rhetoric. Kaplan (1966, 1987) introduced the notion of culture-specific *thought pattern* in his inquiry into rhetoric and writing. His often-cited, controversial research described the differences between *occidental* 'linear' ways of thinking and *oriental* spiral schema of reasoning, and how these are reflected in the rhetorical characteristics of writing. His work stimulated a wealth of research over time indicating that learners' second language writing is interfered with to varying degrees by their native cultural writing conventions (Bickner & Peyasantiwong, 1988; Carlson, 1988; Connor & Lauer, 1988; Hinkel, 1994,

1995, & 1999; Park, 1988; Ramanathan & Atkinson 1999; Shen, 1989; Söter, 1988), although some studies emphasized the positive influence of culture in second language writing (Friedlander, 1990; Uzawa, 1996).

However, hypotheses about the interference of first culture thought patterns in second language writing began to be problematized with the development of the concept of cultural identity - the idea that a writer's identity is reflected in the texts that a writer produces in a second language. I myself have experienced the ambiguity and uncertainty in representing myself in English writing, which is conventionally different from writing in my first language. Later on, repeated comments from East Asian students that I have taught or am acquainted with about difficulties in establishing an effective voice in a Western academic setting motivated me to explore the issue further. Shen's (1989) article, with no doubt, was the catalyst for my research.

The traditional methodology of analyzing written texts for cultural tendencies in writing seemed insufficient for resolving my puzzles with regard to how an ESL learner constructs a new identity in writing. What seemed more crucial to me was to examine the processes by which ESL students learn to write and to present themselves effectively in writing. For this reason, I started to look at research on the processes of writing, including the process of composing and the process of learning to compose. Students' beliefs about writing in these processes obviously influence their performance in writing, and therefore influence the self they exhibit in the texts.

Research on the process of ESL writing has attracted much attention in the field in the past two or three decades. Process-oriented research focuses on how the writer is doing the writing (Donaldson, 1990; Woods, 1984). The examination of how learners

compose and learn to compose shed much light on my query of how writer identity is shaped through the process of writing, and how their beliefs about writing change under the multiple influences of their first culture, the target culture, their educational background, their new learning context, as well as the beliefs of their teachers. In other words, it is in the processes of writing and learning to write, that these notions of culture, identity and beliefs encounter each other, interweave, merge, and finally work together to construct the identity exhibited in the texts. Therefore, writer identity is a multifaceted concept that goes beyond cultural identity in the way it has traditionally been conceptualized, incorporating multiple facets; it is the result of what goes on during the processes of writing. Understanding writer identity calls for an understanding of how texts are created and how self is presented as a result of struggles, confusions and negotiations, and how multiple factors influence the writer's progress over time. This is the driving force as well as destination of this research.

2. Culture in ESL writing

A prerequisite for studying cultural influence on writing is an understanding of cultural differences pertaining to education between different societies. For example, some researchers in psychology have done a systematic analysis of the origins of Asian and Western cultural disparities. They found that the divide between oriental and occidental reasoning can be traced back to ancient times, when “dialectical argument” and “an appreciation for context and complexity” were flowering in China, whereas “formal logical argument and analytic deduction” flourished in Greece (Nisbett, Peng, Choi & Norenzanyan, 2001). Other educational researchers specifically focused on

cultural assumptions about teaching and learning between *Confucian* methods and *Socratic/Aristotelian* methods. Sharp contrasts have been found between these two educational ideologies in terms of the goals, philosophical assumptions, use of language in communication, and roles of teachers and students (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hinkel, 1994; Lee, 2000; Scollon, 1999; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Yu, 1984; etc.).

Based on the disparities in ideologies pertaining to education, writing as a very important component of instructional learning has been closely examined by a group of researchers from different angles. First, different rhetorical styles in writing have been analysed and were attributed to the influence of different ways of thinking between Eastern and Western culture. For example, Thai students and American students may differ greatly in their concepts of essay structure and their analytical styles (Bickner & Peyasantiwong, 1988). A “circuitous” introduction that is likely to be criticised as irrelevant by a Western teacher can be a well recognised text in a discourse tradition wherein the reader is “gently led to the issue that is to constitute the heart of the discussion” (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991, p.31). In addition, a seemingly plagiarised piece of writing may find its root in the Asian culture in which respect for authority and memorising the sample text are very important parts of learning. Furthermore, an ambiguous conclusion written by an Asian student may also stem from a culture that embraces the deliberate “illogicalities” of Zen Buddhism that appreciates achieving harmony and juxtaposition of ideas (p.33).

In addition, different discourse traditions between Anglo-Saxon and East Asian cultural contexts may also be a factor influencing ESL writing. For example, the writing patterns of Chinese ESL learners and those of Americans can be very different. In the

case of American patterns, the *Aristotelian* explicit approach was valued, whereas in the Chinese case, the more subtle *Confucian*-influenced harmonious approach was valued (Hinkel, 1994). In more specific aspects, even the uses of modal verbs (Hinkel, 1995) and the rhetorical objectivity devices and markers (Hinkel, 1999) in Eastern students' writing can be culture and context dependent, reflecting the fundamental presuppositions that are ubiquitous in Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist writing rather than those expected in Anglo-American academic compositions.

3. Writer identity and learner beliefs in ESL writing

The notion of identity was originally, and is still much discussed in the fields of sociology, anthropology and psychology. However, in recent decades, the study of identity in academic writing has taken the concept across the boundaries of these fields and into the realm of applied linguistics. Researchers of language have commenced inquiry into the linguistic identities of writers, for example, Shen (1989) and Ivanic (1994, 1997). Following them, there are a number of others, such as Hyland (2002a, 2002b), Kramsch (1998), Singh (1999), Thornborrow (1999), also investigating the issue of writer identity. An alternative term *voice* (Ivanic & Camps, 2001; Matsuda, 2001; Prior, 2001) has also been used to refer to a similar but not exactly identical concept.

3.1 Cultural identity

Boundaries of cultural identity are not clear-cut. Every person carries cultural characteristics that are common among the groups he or she belongs to or lives with, and personal characteristics that are unique to him or herself, based on this person's

upbringing, educational history, life or work experiences, as well as his or her personalities. These two elements work together and shape the cultural identity of a particular person. This identity, however, is fluid and changing as personal experience and group history change overtime.

An individual's cultural identity does not carry the same meaning for this individual as for other people who would position him or her from their perspective. In "modern, historically complex, open societies", it becomes more difficult to define the cultural identity of any particular social group and its members because "the racial, ethnic, national identity imposed on an individual by the state's bureaucratic system" and "that individuals' self-ascription" may not equate (Kramsch, 1998, pp.66-67). Since the person being positioned and the people who position this person are all subject to potential change, it seems unreasonable to maintain the rigidity of any stereotype of cultural identity; instead, there may only be tendencies towards a certain cultural identity.

3.2 Writer identity

Growing out of the soil of cultural identity is the notion of writer identity. It seems convenient for people to think that writer identity is the reflection of the writer's cultural identity because the way a writer sees the world and the way he or she chooses to express him or herself are much constrained by the culture this writer belongs to. However, the notion of writer identity goes beyond the scope of cultural identity. It is true that in many cases, the "consistency or ambivalence" in individuals' identification manifests itself in language (Ivanic, 1997, p.38). However, it is also not uncommon that

writers' "allegiances and therefore language choices" alter (p.38) as they change and as the contexts of writing change.

Since "almost everything we write says something about us and the sort of relationship that we want to set up with our readers" (Hyland, 2002b, p.352), the identity a writer adopts in writing encompasses multiple sources of influence. This identity may bear the writer's cultural and individual characteristics, and his or her perceptions of writing; in addition, it also reflects the stance he assumes to be appropriate as a result of reader awareness (Ivanic, 1997, p.95). In other words, the notion of writer identity takes on a strategic characteristic of choice.

For the special group of ESL writers, the establishment of a proper identity becomes a particularly daunting task. Shen's (1989) article was among the earliest that explored the cultural influences on ESL writer identity. She showed how her cultural background shaped her approaches to writing in English and how writing in English redefined her ideological and logical identities. The "self" expected in a Western academic setting, she asserted, was distant from the "self" that bore strong native cultural features. To be oneself, according to Shen, was not to be one's "true" self, but a self that was a delicate balance of one's first cultural self and the second cultural self.

Shen's contribution to the research of ESL writing lies in the fact she brought in a fresh notion of reshaping writer identity in a second language setting. Since then, researchers have started to spotlight the investigation of writer identity and ESL writer identity. For instance, writer identity was discussed in relation to discoursal construction. Writers were shaped by the language and practices they were exposed to (Casanave, 1992), and were positioned by their "discourse choices", namely, the content and the

form of their writing (Ivanic, 1994). Therefore, it is a special challenge for multilingual writers to create a new identity and a way of self-representation in a second language. Even writers who are accomplished in their first language feel constrained when they write in a second language (Hirvela & Belcher, 2001). The voice heard in their writing is neither that of first language or second language, but rather, a mixture of both.

3.3 Learner beliefs and writer identity

In an instructional learning setting, the notion of writer identity becomes yet more complex, as the construction of identity includes features of the learning situation, for example, differences in the learner's and teacher's beliefs about writing, as well as differences in beliefs about learning and teaching. The readers of the students' writing in most cases are teachers, who may evaluate the writing according to their beliefs, which may or may not incorporate the learners' beliefs. It has been generally recognized that teachers' and learners' beliefs reflect their respective cultural backgrounds and educational histories, as well as other factors significant to them (Borg, 1998, 1999; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; Calderhead, 1995; Horwitz, 1999; Johnson, 1995; Pajares, 1992; Woods, 1996). It has also been recognized that beliefs about language learning influence the interpretations of learners and teachers and the actions and strategies that they carry out (Horwitz, 1999). To be more specific, "they [beliefs about language learning] affect learners' receptivity to different learning activities and to their strategy choices, which ultimately affect the level of attainment in the second language" (Woods, in press, p.199). When students and teachers enter the same classroom with different beliefs about learning and writing as a result of their prior experiences and cultural

backgrounds, there is much to negotiate between them, as well as among students themselves who may come from divergent cultures. This negotiation may lead to the changing of beliefs in both parties, but in most cases, students are the ones who tend to be influenced more evidently by the beliefs of the teachers and the characteristics of the new learning context.

The concepts of writer identity and learner beliefs are closely linked. Learner beliefs reflect what the writer holds as appropriate about writing itself and about the information he or she conveys in writing. In addition, learner beliefs reflect what the learner holds as appropriate about processes of learning. Learner beliefs play a role in shaping writer identity. The identity demonstrated in writing may vary to a certain degree to meet the requirements of different learning tasks and to satisfy the tastes of different audiences, including the teacher. Writer identity in an ESL classroom therefore may not be a portrayal of an actual writer identity, but rather a stew of the writer's ideas mixed with awareness of the teacher as reader and of the context of the learning situation.

4. Product, micro-process and macro-process in ESL writing:

An important distinction made in research on writing is that between product and process. The term product, or product of writing, refers to the written texts which are produced by writers. The term process, or writing process or composing process, refers to the decisions, actions and strategies carried out by the writer in the process of producing a text. Process-based research first developed in the 1970s and quickly bloomed in the 1980s. The focus on process thereafter became one of the major themes in the studies of ESL writing. "The emphasis is both on writing something that is meaningful to the writer

as well as on crafting and shaping something to suit a particular audience” (Donaldson, 1990, p.26). However, research into cultural characteristics in writing has remained for the most part in the domain of product.

For purposes of this thesis, I wish to introduce a further distinction between two types of processes related to writing. I will use the terms *micro-process* and *macro-process* to distinguish them. The term *micro-process* refers to the process of composing a written text. It is the immediate process in which the goal is to produce a specific piece of writing through a set of activities. The micro-process includes a number of actions or strategies such as drafting, revising, brainstorming, getting feedback, editing etc. (Woods, 1984). The term *macro-process* refers to the process of learning to compose written texts. The goal is not primarily to produce a written text, but to learn to produce future written texts more effectively and of higher quality. The macro-process can include aspects which do not occur in the micro-process, such as explicit instruction about the writing conventions of different genres and different social contexts. It also includes such actions and strategies as brainstorming, revising and getting feedback, which are also micro-process elements. However, in the case of the macro-process, the long-term goal of learning to write takes precedence over the short-term goal of completing a particular piece of writing. The reason that some of these macro-process actions and strategies are identical to those of the micro-process is that practice in the micro-process is assumed to be part of the macro-process. The difference lies in the goals chosen. For example, when a teacher says “I don’t care about the product, I want you to learn to write”, the focus is on the macro-process; and when a student says “I just want to finish this essay”, the focus is on the micro-process. There can be a combined or fluctuating focus as well, and

sometimes the differences in focus can be subtle and the goals ambiguous. However, the distinction is a central one to this thesis.

Micro-process includes a number of writing strategies that aim at improving students' writing ability by writing, instead of accumulating grammar and vocabulary. A model of the writing process is provided by Donaldson (1990, p.27).

Figure 1 A Model of Writing Process (Donaldson, 1990, p.27)

Macro-process includes, in addition to provision of instruction and models, a number of instances of *micro-processes*, one after another, in which ESL writers learn, practice and get familiar with English writing conventions through these specific writing tasks. The macro-process can also be seen as the contexts of learning and change in which the micro-processes occur. Within the pedagogical setting of macro-process, the micro-processes can be systematically inter-connected, which allows writers to progress in a smooth and coherent way (as shown in Figure 2 which represents an idealized situation).

Figure 2 Relationship of micro-processes and macro-process (1)

Or, the micro-processes can be sometimes inter-related, other times having a gap at certain stages; but the trend is still toward the overall development of the writing competence (as shown in Figure 3). This diagram reflects a more realistic situation which usually happens when learners shift from one social context, or one educational system, or one institution, or even one class to another.

Figure 3 Relationship of micro-processes and macro-process (2)

However, these diagrams only indicate the simplified situation because the real learning situations can be much more complicated. Learners may learn to write in instructional or non-instructional settings. In some non-instructional settings, people can learn to write just by writing, which indicates that a focus on the micro-process can nevertheless lead to learning. However, in most cases, within the structured learning at school, students get systematic training in writing in the macro-process, through classroom instructions, models, and practices of micro-process strategies. Even so, however, they might have plenty of practice on certain micro-process strategies, but have inadequate training in other strategies, depending on the teaching methodologies prevailing in the context and the teacher's preference in teaching. Some learners may learn better through unstructured practice, such as in the workplace where they learn a certain genre through actually using it repeatedly as a part of their work. Though the focus initially may be on the micro-process, the learner can develop good writing strategies in the macro-process in the long run. In a sense, the macro-process is very much influenced by the outcome of micro-processes.

In this thesis, I mainly look at the writing processes in structured settings where students learn to write under the instruction of the teacher. At times students may get extra help from other sources, this diagnostic and remedial instruction can be viewed as reinforcement of certain micro-processes in the chain of the macro-process.

To date, the writing process under investigation has been mostly the composing process, that is, the micro-process. A large body of literature has contributed to certain writing strategies such as free writing (Lee, 1999), peer review (Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Stanley, 1992; Zhu, 2001) and teacher feedback (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hyland &

Hyland, 2001; Jacobs et al., 1998), or the writing process itself which accommodates these strategies (Pennington et al., 1996; Woods, 1984). Comparatively, fewer studies are targeted at the longer process (macro-process) in which ESL students learn to write (Leki & Carson, 1994). In this thesis, I wish to emphasize the macro-process in an instructional (ESL) setting.

5. Identity in the product and processes of ESL writing

5.1 Identity in the product of ESL writing

The research on cultural influence in ESL writing has traditionally centered on analyzing the product. Some authors have focused on the surface features of the text such as the use of pronouns, or the organization of the text, or the discoursal construction, and how these are related to culture, and more recently to identity. This focus on product is actually a focus on what the writer is “being” instead of what the writer is “doing” (Ivanic, 1997, p.95).

5.2 Identity in the micro-process of ESL writing

The focus on what the writer is “doing” is the focus on the process of writing, that is, how the writing is produced. In recent decades, this aspect of writing has drawn more and more attention among researchers of ESL writing. Studies on process writing usually center on specific classroom practices such as free writing, peer feedback, multi-draft, and so on. It has been noticed that students do not accept all the writing strategies unanimously. Some may reject one strategy as being useless but accept another easily (Woods, 1984). Attention therefore has been paid to the fact that culturally divergent

students may have diverse attitudes toward these practices as a result of their prior learning background (Ashwell, 2000; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Zamel, 1983; Zhang, 1995; etc.). A connection has been built up to show how cultural and writer identity interacts with decisions made during the writing process.

5.3 Identity in the macro-process of ESL writing

However, the cultural factors in writing should also be investigated in the learning process through which ESL writers develop a new system of self-representation, and how their cultural identity and writer identity affect their ways of learning to write in English. ESL writing involves multiple identities (Ivanic 1997); it is influenced by the writer's cultural identity, but goes beyond native cultural influence. A number of other factors also play a role in the process of learning to write in English. For example, students have to learn the target language writing conventions once they start to write in English. What are these conventions and how different are they from the students' native cultural writing presuppositions? Besides, teachers' beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (Woods, 1996) directly influence the teaching method and the way the process of ESL writing is presented in the classroom learning environment. Moreover, there is another important factor contributing to the progress in students' writing, which is ESL writers' own beliefs in language learning and their readiness to accept the teacher's beliefs, and how they work toward their goals in academic writing. This aspect of ESL writing, though studied to some extent, needs to be explored further and more in depth.

However, one gap I have found in the field is that, despite a limited number of studies on the influence of a person's cultural identity on the construction of writer identity, nothing has been done to question how students' cultural identity and writer identity interplay with their beliefs in language learning and teaching, and how this interconnection between identity and belief systems affects the micro and macro-process, as well as their relationship in ESL writing. This thesis will depart from the studies on product and processes, in which culture, identity and beliefs are treated separately. Then, I will aim at explaining the link of these notions through a study that I have undertaken. The beliefs of teachers and students in terms of language learning and academic writing as a result of their cultural influence will be examined. The interplay of cultural characteristics, writer identity and learner beliefs will be discussed in order to explore the construction of ESL writer identity and the evolution of beliefs in ESL writing.

6. An overview of the paper

6.1 Research questions

As indicated above, ESL writing is influenced by many factors. It reflects the native and target cultural conventions, teacher and student beliefs, and likely, individual differences in learning and writing. It is based on culture, but goes far beyond the cultural stereotype. This study will explore not only the product of ESL writing as bearing cultural characteristics, but also the influence of cultural identity and writer identity in the processes through which students work towards the final product, and the processes in which students achieve mastery in producing texts.

This research will address the following questions:

1. What is the interplay of culture, writer identity and learner beliefs in the product, micro-process and macro-process of ESL writing?
2. What are the signs of evolution of ESL learner beliefs, and how does the evolution of learner beliefs influence the product, micro-process and macro-process of writing?

6.2 Organization of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and an overview of the whole research. Chapter 2 presents the literature describing the influence of first culture on ESL academic writing, and then describes the traditional notion of writer identity and the more recent notion of multiple identities. It provides background on research that has been done in the area of culture and identity, and their relationship to features of written text (product). To explore issues of micro and macro processes of writing, we need to look at the literature on beliefs, which is presented in Chapter 3. This Chapter discusses how the beliefs of ESL learners and teachers evolve from their previous education and life experiences; and how these beliefs influence the processes of ESL writing. This is the focus of this research, especially the macro-process through which learners alter their beliefs and learn to write using effective ways of self-representation. Chapter 4 outlines a study I carried out investigating the product and process of ESL writing as related to the concepts of writer identity and learner beliefs introduced previously. Data is analyzed in light of the literature reviewed as well as the qualitative methodological literature. Chapter 5 includes further discussion of the themes that arise from the data analysis and a response to the research questions based on the literature and the study, as well as the conclusion of this thesis.

Chapter 2

Product in ESL Writing: Culture and Writer Identity

1. Introduction

Research on the texts produced by ESL writers has gone through an evolution: first came studies focusing on comparative rhetoric; next were studies of linguistic and cultural interference; following this were studies of the ways in which texts are a product of writer identity; and most recently have come studies involving the notion of multiple identities in ESL writing. Although these most recent studies put emphasis on the formation and use of a writer's identity, they are still, in terms of writing, product-based. They do not include in their analysis the writing process (which I am terming the micro-process) and the process of learning to write (which I am terming the macro-process).

Fries (1945) and Lado (1957) brought in the notion of culture in second language learning. However, it was Kaplan's (1966, 1987) notion of cultural thought patterns that inspired a large body of research exploring rhetorical styles and discourse traditions exhibited in students' texts across cultures (Bickner & Peyasantiwong, 1988; Carlson, 1988; Söter, 1988; to name a few). Kaplan's influence has lasted until recent years; researchers have continued to examine the language usage of different ethnic groups in light of cultural differences. (Hinkel, 1994, 1995, & 1999; Ramanathan & Atkinson 1999). These studies have been product-focused and endeavored to elicit negative cultural influences by way of contrastive analysis of finished texts. One of the themes in this endeavor has been an emphasis on the comparison of East Asian and Western culture (such as that of Shen, 1989) for the reason that these two worlds have differed in many aspects, such as educational ideologies and discourse traditions.

As a result of studies on cultural thought patterns and first language interference in second language textual features, researchers started to look at writer identity as reflected in ESL writing (Ivanic, 1994; Cadman, 1997). The research at this stage was initially sparked by Shen's (1989) discussion of her struggles in establishing a proper second cultural self that was distinctive from her first cultural self in written text. More recently, studies have begun to examine the construction of writer identity in second language writing multi-dimensionally, looking at multiple instances that shape the writer's identity and how these are manifested in texts (Clark & Ivanic, 1997; Ivanic, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Thornborrow, 1999).

In the first section of this chapter, I will introduce and elaborate the concepts of culture and identity in relation to language and writing, but not from a cross-cultural perspective. In the second section, I will re-introduce these concepts with a cross-cultural focus by discussing cultural influence on rhetorical styles in second language writing and on the construction of ESL writer identity. This writer identity is based on the conventions of first culture but goes beyond the cultural stereotype.

Research on culture and writer identity discussed in this chapter is primarily product-based, and does not focus on how texts are produced. The studies on the processes of ESL writing (micro and macro) represent another stream in the field. In this area, it is not the notion of writer identity which has evolved, but that of "beliefs". It is the purpose of Chapters 2 and 3 to relate these two streams.

2. Culture and writer identity

To understand the relationship of culture and writer identity, the concept of culture in relation to language has to be clarified first because cultural influence on writer identity is reflected through the medium of language.

2.1 Language and culture

2.1.1 The notion of culture

The concept of culture has been ambiguous, complicated and sometimes even controversial for the reason that it is understood in different ways and is examined from different perspectives depending on the purposes of the authors. Schieffelin & Ochs (1986) defined it as “bodies of knowledge, structures of understanding, concepts of the world, ... collective representations” (p.166). Deng & Liu (1995), in the broad sense, referred it to “the total pattern of beliefs, customs, institutions, objects, and techniques that characterize the life of a human community”. It comprises not only material things such as cities and organizations, but also non-material things such as ideas, customs and language (p.3). Gee (1990) viewed it from the perspective of social practices and group ideologies through which one is marked as a member of a socially defined group or discourse. Duranti (1997), from the perspective of linguistic anthropology, has reviewed six theories of culture in which language plays a significant role with the assumption that the premise of linguistic anthropology is language being understood as cultural practice. He summarized these theories as: culture as distinct from nature; culture as knowledge; as communication; as a system of mediation; as a system of practices; and as a system of participation.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will quote Kramersch (1998), whose definition of culture is

membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common social imaginings. Even when they have left that community, its members may retain, wherever they are, a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting. These standards are what is generally called their 'culture' (p.10).

The above-mentioned definitions of culture, despite their different perspectives, share one thing in common, that is, the emphasis on the important role language plays in the preservation, representation and perpetuation of culture.

2.1.2 Relationship of language and culture

The indissoluble relationship of language and culture has been widely recognized by researchers. "Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives"; it is "bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways" when it is used in contexts of communication (Kramersch, 1998, p.3). It is, therefore, the keystone of culture, without which culture would not be possible. It reflects culture, but is also influenced and shaped by culture. It is, as stated by Deng & Liu (1995) in the previous chapter, "the symbolic representation of a people, and it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds as well as their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking" (p.3). To effectively express the connection between language and culture, Agar (1994) invented the term *languaculture* as a reminder of the *necessary* tie between them. By combining the two together, one does not have to wonder about the missing half in discussion of language or culture (p.60).

Sapir (1949) and Whorf (1956) were among those earlier scholars who were interested in the linguistic and philosophical differences between cultures and the impact language has on our perceptions of reality (Singh, 1999). The well-known Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis incorporates two theories: the theory of linguistic relativity and the theory of linguistic determinism. The former states that different cultures interpret the world differently, and their languages encode these differences and reflect their perceptions of reality. The latter states that the language people use profoundly affects how they think; there is a causality – a determination of thinking processes is caused by language. To be more specific, “continuous use of a particular language, or a discourse within that language, reinforces the perceptions encoded in the language so they become firmly entrenched and difficult to question” (p.30).

Kramsch (1998) also highlighted the close relationship of language and culture but began to examine the interaction between language and culture. First, language expresses cultural reality with the words people utter, and the attitudes, beliefs and ideas reflected in these utterances. Second, language embodies cultural reality by creating meanings comprehensible to the group they are a part of, through its verbal and non-verbal aspects such as speech, accent and facial expressions. Moreover, language symbolizes cultural reality in the sense that speakers identify themselves and others as members of a social community through their use of the language.

In summarizing different theories on language and culture, Duranti (1997) emphasized the two-way relationship, asserting that language is both a product and an instrument of culture. Language is the major component of the communicative system and implies the theories of the world in a culture. At the same time, it serves as “a useful

link between inner thought and public behavior”; it is “a source for knowledge”, and “a tool for the representation of such knowledge” (pp. 49-50).

2.2 Language, culture and identity

2.2.1 Cultural identity

One aspect of the relationship of language and culture that has become the focus of recent research is the notion of identity. “It is widely believed that there is a natural connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and that group’s identity” (Kramsch, 1998, p.66). Kramsch further elaborated the statement:

By their accent, their vocabulary, their discourse patterns, speakers identify themselves and are identified as members of this or that speech and discourse community. From this membership, they draw personal strength and pride, as well as a sense of social importance and historical continuity from using the same language as the group they belong to. (p.66)

Linguistic identity and cultural identity are usually distinguished though they are closely inter-related. Thornborrow (1999) understood linguistic identity as determined by various factors such as a person’s accent (the phonological level of language) and the variety of the language the person speaks (grammatical variations). “Language is *the* most sensitive indicator of the relationship between an individual and a given social group” (Kramsch, 1998, p.77). A person’s linguistic identity is based on his or her cultural identity but goes beyond it. The individual identity is cast out of the melting pot of ethnical background, educational history, life experience, linguistic competence, and many other factors. The multi-identity of individuals in connection with language is articulated by Kramsch (1998), “Despite the entrenched belief in one language = one

culture equation, individuals assume several collective identities that are likely not only to change over time in dialogue with others, but are liable to conflict with one another.”

(p. 67)

Speaking of the relation of discourse and identity, Kramsch (1998) differentiated the notions of speech community from discourse community. The former is composed of people who use the same linguistic code; the latter refers to the common ways in which members of a social group use language to meet their social needs. The discourse of people, that is, their grammatical, lexical, and phonological features, as well as the topics they choose to talk about, the way they present information, the style with which they interact, all position them into the discourse community in which they maintain a membership.

Kramsch (1998) tended to blur the notions of cultural identity and group identity. They were used interchangeably in her book. She discussed two aspects of the cultural identity of a group. On the one side, the group identity pertains to how members in the group perceive what they are or what they should be. On the other side, group identity is “a cultural perception”. In other words, our perception of a person’s social identity is much culturally determined. “What we perceive about a person’s culture and language is what we have been conditioned by our own culture to see, and the stereotypical models already built around our own. Group identity is a question of focusing and diffusion of ethnic, racial, national concepts or stereotypes.” (pp. 67-68). Therefore, a person’s cultural identity is not something that can always be determined by the person himself; it is also bound up with how others perceive him (Thornborrow, 1999).

2.2.2 Writer identity

When introducing this notion to writing, we can say that a writer's voice in writing also reveals the discourse community he or she belongs to. However, writing as careful, thoughtful, and relatively permanent records of a person's mind, may not always portray the author's thoughts honestly. It may distort, exaggerate, or disguise the author's real intent in producing the writing. In fact, there can be intentionality in the identity portrayed. Therefore, the notion of writer identity becomes more complicated. Writer identity is born out of the multiple identities of a person, but has some artificial and purposeful elements embedded in it. Just as people dress up differently to suit different occasions, writers compose in different styles and tones to favor the taste of the assumed reader groups.

In academic writing, there seems to be less argument over identity, partly because of what is perceived as its rigid genre and objective content. However, the fact is that the issue of the writer's voice in academic writing has been attracting more and more attention in the field of language research in the last decade. Hyland (2002b) stated that academic writing is "a variety of subject-specific literacies", through which members of the disciplines communicate with each other (p.352). The writer must adopt an appropriate identity by choosing the words in the way that interests and informs the reader properly. According to Hyland, whatever we write tells something about ourselves and the relationship that we wish to establish with our readers.

The notion of writer identity has been separated into different components. In the view of Clark and Ivanic (Ivanic, 1997; Clark & Ivanic, 1997), writer identity is

composed of four aspects, as illustrated by the following figure (Clark & Ivanic, 1997, p.137):

Figure 6.1 Aspects of writer identity

Figure 4 Aspects of writer identity (Clark & Ivanic, 1997)

The term *autobiographical self* emphasizes the writer's life history and the sense of the person's roots. This self is not a fixed "real self", but is changing as a consequence of the author's developing life history. The term *autobiographical self* captures the idea that the writer's way of representing his changing experiences to himself constitutes his current way of being (Clark & Ivanic, 1997; Ivanic, 1997). A writer's *discoursal self* is the self-representation in the text. It is the voice a writer consciously or unconsciously conveys in

a particular written text. This voice may not be the stance the writer is taking, but rather, the way the writer wants to sound. The *self as author* represents the “writer’s sense of authority, and authorial presence in the text”. “This aspect of writer identity concerns the writer’s ‘voice’ in the sense of the writer’s position, opinions and beliefs”, which are particularly significant in the discussion of academic writing because writers differ in how far they claim authority and how far they “establish an authorial presence in their writing” (Ivanic, 1997 pp.25-26). This authoritativeness can also be seen as an aspect of the discoursal self. The above-mentioned aspects of writer identity are all concerned with “actual people writing actual texts” (Ivanic, 1997, p. 27). The fourth meaning of writer identity is concerned with socially available possibilities for self-hood. It is the most abstract aspect of writer identity for the reason that “subject positions are not characteristics of any specific individual” (Clark & Ivanic, p.136). In any institutional context, Ivanic argues, there are several socially available possibilities for self-hood: several ways of doing the same thing; some being privileged over others. However, these possibilities for self-hood are also “shaped by individual acts of writing in which people take on particular discoursal identity” (Ivanic, 1997, p.27).

3. Influence of first culture on the texts of ESL writers

When we talk about the cultural influence on writing, the underlying assumption is that cultures are different, and it is the differences that cause problems in communication. One of the main foci for investigation in the field of writing research has been the contrastive features found between Eastern and Western cultures. The inquiry of

how culture influences Asian students' writing in a Western academic setting has started with the understanding of how these two cultures differ.

3.1 The notions of Eastern culture and Western culture

Although geographic distance may not necessarily result in fundamental cultural differences (such as the division of the Western world as distinct to the Eastern world implying that English-speaking countries, in spite of their geographic distances, belong to the same world, namely, the same culture), differences across ethnic groups have been found to be non-negligible barriers to cross-cultural communications.

Researchers use different terms when talking about the Eastern and the Western world, such as Oriental vs. Occidental, Confucian vs. Socratic, East Asian vs. Anglo-American, to name a few. Tweed & Lehman (2002) suggest the shorthand term *culturally Western* (Socratic) to refer to culturally Western English-speaking individuals of any ethnic group, and *culturally Chinese* (Confucian) to reference culturally Chinese individuals of any ethnic group (p.89). In this thesis, I will borrow their terms but modify *culturally Chinese* to *culturally Eastern* with the proviso that this references individuals from East Asian countries such as China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, etc., which are heavily influenced by traditional Chinese culture of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism (Ballards & Clanchy, 1991; Hinkel, 1994, 1995, 1999; Nisbett et al., 2001; Scollon, 1999; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; etc.). For convenience, the terms *Oriental*, *Eastern* or *East Asian* will also be used as synonyms of *culturally Eastern*, and *Western*, *North American*, *Anglo-American* or *Anglo-Saxon* may be used as a short term for

culturally Western. On some occasions, *Chinese* will also be used to refer to *culturally Chinese* for brevity.

3.2 Contrastive cultural studies

Cultural differences have traditionally accounted for the gap that second language learners attempt to bridge. The diversity of language and culture across national and ethnic groupings has been attributed to historical, philosophical, social elements that are particular to that group. Nisbett and his colleagues (Ji, Peng & Nisbett, 2000; Masuda & Nisbett, 2001; Peng & Nisbett, 1999; etc. as cited in Nisbett et al., 2001) have done extensive research on the diversity of cultural patterns. Their purpose is to try to define and elaborate on differences between Eastern and Western culture. They have found that people raised in different cultures think in different ways. East Asians tend to think more “holistically”. They pay greater attention to environment and relationship, they are more sensitive to context, and are more tolerant of contradiction; they make relatively little use of categories and formal logic. These cultural traits show the strong influence of Taoist thought, in which complexity and dialectical argument are appreciated. “Holistic approaches rely on experienced-based knowledge rather than on abstract logic and are dialectical, meaning that there is an emphasis on change, a recognition of contradiction and of the need for multiple perspectives, and a search for the ‘Middle Way’ between opposing propositions” (Nisbett et al. p.294). On the other hand, Westerners are more “analytic” in their thinking. They are likely to detach objects from their background environment, they are eager to resolve contradiction, and are more dependent on the rules of formal logic. This Occidental thinking is in line with the ancient Greek tradition of

adversarial debate, in which formal logical argument and analytic deduction are common tools in argument.

3.3 Contrastive rhetoric

The results of Nisbett and his colleagues' studies align with Kaplan's (1966, 1987) notion of culture-specific thought patterns to some extent. Kaplan suggested that there are specific thought patterns inherent to specific cultures, and they are related to rhetorical features of written texts. A sharp contrast lies in the Western linear way of reasoning and Eastern circuitous way of thinking. His work has been widely cited thereafter, and has led to heated discussions in the area of second language writing. For example, Söter (1988) ascertained that the Vietnamese students and the Arabic students in her study exhibited patterns of narration that reflected distinctive cultural thought patterns, which were different both from each other and from those of native English writers. Kachru (1988), however, pointed out that Hindi writing both exhibits the straight linear structure and exemplifies the circular structure, which is not indicative of cultural differences in thinking.

Following Kaplan's (1966; 1987) notion of cultural thought patterns, a large number of studies have focused on discussions about the cultural influence on second language writing in terms of discourse traditions and rhetorical styles as affected by thought patterns. It has been argued that rhetorical patterns that writers have learned in their specific cultures may differ from patterns used in Anglo-American academic settings (Carlson, 1988).

Kaplan (1966; 1987) defined the English discourse tradition as linear, based upon Platonic-Aristotelian thought patterns. This is reflected in the paragraph structure in expository writing:

The thought patterns which speakers of English appear to expect as an integral part of their communication is a sequence that is dominantly linear in its development. An English expository paragraph usually begins with a topic statement, and then, by a series of subdivisions of that topic statement, each supported by examples and illustrations, proceeds to develop that central idea and relate that idea to all the other ideas in the whole essay, ... Contrarily, the English paragraph may use just the reverse procedure; that is, it may state a whole series of examples and then relate those examples into a single statement at the end of the paragraph. These two types of development represent the common inductive and deductive reasoning which the English reader expects to be an integral part of any formal communication. (Kaplan, 1980, p.402, cited in Kachru, 1988)

This discourse tradition was contrastive to the Eastern “beating around the bush” (Shen, 1989) pattern. These two patterns have become the stereotypes of Eastern and Western writing styles.

The stereotypical rhetorical styles have been endorsed by a number of studies. Bickner & Peyasantiwong (1988) analyzed reflective writings of Thai and American students, and found several interesting points of contrast between the two groups in their attitudes toward language use, their concepts of essay structure and their analytical styles. Thai students paid more attention to the implicit suggestion on the degree of text formality and tended to be more impersonal and formal. They also strove to give a balanced perspective, considering the point of view of different parties, and were likely to offer advice in the conclusion. On the other hand, American students’ writings were generally more personal, with a conversational tone. They did not attempt to justify the

positions of different parties, and drew their conclusions from their own points of view(s).

Ballard and Clanchy (1991) also touched upon different rhetorical traditions between Anglo-Saxon and East Asian cultural contexts. For example, Thai students were likely to see the direct and immediate approach to an essay topic as blunt and lacking in subtlety. They took the writer's task as to "collaborate in the gradual unfolding of the subject, not take it by the throat and interrogate it from the very outset" (p.30). The function of an introduction, seemingly irrelevant and circuitous to a Westerner, was to provide a broad setting for the issue to be discussed in a gentle way. The same is true for the conclusion. In many Asian traditions, there exists a tendency to value appreciation over criticism, summary over analysis, and reproduction over originality. Students do not have the pressure to resolve dilemmas, or to reach clear-cut conclusions. Instead, there is willingness to tolerate ambiguity or contradiction by taking the middle path. Their effort of achieving harmony certainly cannot meet the requirement of critical judgement of Western teachers.

Hinkel (1994) pinpointed the ideological differences that guide the writing styles in Eastern and Western cultures. He focused on the distinctions between native speakers' (NS) and non-native speakers' (NNS) pragmatic interpretations of Anglo-American notions pertaining to writing, such as a text's audience and purpose, specificity, support for the main idea, and persuasiveness. By comparing NS and NNS evaluations of four short essays, two written by NS and two by advanced Chinese ESL learners, Hinkel found that there was little similarity between NS and NNS judgements on these items. The results of the study were interpreted as the influence of different discourse traditions,

namely the Aristotelian justification and Confucian precepts. In Chinese writing, the need for explication was not self-evident, but the need to maintain harmony was. These writing conventions reflected their Confucian cultural heritage and the classic Chinese writing tradition. On the other hand, in Anglo-American rhetorical framework, vagueness and ambiguity were viewed negatively. Explicit argumentation was considered more effective, and concrete support for most points was expected. In addition, Hinkel (1995) indicated that the usage of root modals was culture and context dependent. For example, Eastern students use more obligatory modal verbs such as “should” and “must” in texts related to family duties, moral values and interpersonal relationship, but use less of these modals than American students in discussion of government functions and individual rights. This tendency in writing reflected their fundamental presuppositions that were ubiquitous in Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist societies. Further, Hinkel (1999) found that advanced and trained L2 learners from cultures influenced by Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist precepts employed the rhetorical objectivity devices and markers common to the Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist writing traditions, which were beyond the expectations of Western educators in Anglo-American academic settings.

The rhetorical styles employed in part influence the way that writers convey information to the reader and the kind of identities exhibited in the writing. Therefore, writer identity in the text inevitably references the person’s cultural heritage. For writers of a second language, the rhetorical traditions that they follow may not comport with the traditions accepted in that culture. To create a new identity usually involves a period of struggle, and the identity in the writing may display more complicated components.

3.4 Culture and the construction of writer identity in ESL writing

The process by which a non-native speaker learns to write academic texts in English in a Western university, according to Shen (1989), involves creating a new identity which meets the expectations of the professors or teachers representing the discipline in which the student is becoming a new member. A writer's explicit appearance in a text (using the first person pronoun) in this setting works to create a plausible academic identity and a voice with which to present an argument (Hyland, 2002b). Creating such an identity, however, presents a demanding situation for second language writers. The reason, in part, lies in the fact that this identity can differ considerably from what the writer is familiar with based on his previous life and learning experiences. Shen's (1989) autobiographic description of the process of redefining her "ideological and logical identities" has been frequently quoted as an example of the confusing experience of learning to write in a Western higher learning setting, where her cultural background put her in a disadvantaged position. In Chinese culture, modesty is a virtue and collectivism is the dominant ideology. Reflected in written discourse, writers are not supposed to overuse *I*, which implies conceit; so *I* is often disguised by *we* in order to keep uniform with others and also to keep a sense of belonging to a group. This is a reflection of the Eastern collectivism, which advocates that individual thought should always be in concert with group thought. However, in Western culture individual voice is respected; writers are expected to express their own views no matter what opinions the authorities may have. This fundamental difference provides a good explanation of the phenomenon that Eastern students appear not critical enough in the eyes of Western

teachers. Hyland (2002a) also lamented that ESL writers' significant underuse of first person pronouns in their academic writing was the result of the uncomfortable feelings caused by the connotations of authority these pronouns imply. These examples of discourse choice between different groups were perfect illustrations of Bakhtin's (1981, in Ivanic 1997, p. 43) statement that

All words have a "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. ... Language is not neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated, overpopulated – with the intentions of others.

A number of studies have tried to explore the discoursal construction of writer identity among graduate students, who are generally supposed to have received more training in academic writing and therefore have less problem with self-positioning in writing. The results, however, indicated that the construction of successful writer identity for advanced learners is also problematic. Ivanic (1994) explained the notions of "writer identities", writer positioning and the discoursal construction of writer identities by examining a PhD candidate's academic writing. She asserted that the writer is positioned by the content and the form of her writing. "Writers who are trying new discoursal identities often find it hard to preserve syntactic fluency (p.8)." As a result, writers shifting from one culture to another and writing in a language other than their mother tongue are facing an especially difficult situation when they have to meet the academic requirements of the society they newly enter.

Casanave (1992) maintained that the language and practices students were exposed to constrain their ways of thinking and deprive them of other ways of exploring knowledge. In many cases, the “second socialization (that of adults into socially sanctioned roles at home and at work)” (p.149) for international or minority group students is much more difficult than for people studying in their first cultural setting. She attributed her PhD subject’s decision to leave the program to “many layers of conflicts having to do with language and ways of knowing” (p.169). Going a little further, Hirvela and Belcher (2001), investigated the writing process of three mature international graduate students, who have established successful professional writer status in their native language and culture. Despite their excellence in manipulating their first language, these multilingual writers were also faced with a special challenge in creating a new identity and a way of self-representation in a second language. The voice heard from their writing exhibited multiple influences of both first and second languages, as well as discipline-specific expectations.

Some researchers are interested in the possible reasons that make second language writing extremely difficult. In addition to the influence of first cultural writing conventions, another reason is also evident in Hyland’s (2002b) study; that is, student writers are rarely taught that disciplinary conventions differ. Hyland compared the writing of expert writers with that of Hong Kong university students. He found that “the expert writers were three times more likely to use author pronouns in their texts, and this ratio held across both hard and soft disciplines” (p.353). He attributed students’ underuse of author pronouns to two main reasons: one is educational—students have been taught not to bring their personal opinions into writing; the other is cultural—they felt

uncomfortable with the personal authority that the use of *I* implied. Hyland further clarified the second reason: “First person pronouns are a powerful way of projecting a strong writer identity, and this individualistic kind of stance seems to clash with beliefs and practices that value more collectivist forms of self-representation” (p.354). Cadman (1997) investigated international graduate students’ perceptions about their writing experiences. A significant cause of difficulty in their thesis writing, according to Cadman, may lie in the different epistemologies in which these students have been trained in their previous education, and in which their identities as learners are rooted.

Research on ESL writer identity has evolved from looking at the struggles and analyzing the reasons for the struggles to develop an appropriate identity, to recent examination of the multiple identities that writers can have, and that writers can choose for a particular purpose. For second language writers, their first language writing conventions and first cultural perceptions add to the complexity of the multiple sources that influence the construction of their writer identities. The struggling is an inevitable stage, through which writers negotiate and redefine their identities and make them fit well into the academic settings that they have to come to terms with. The construction of ESL writer identity, therefore, involves the writers’ native cultural influence, individual characteristics, knowledge of genre required, and the awareness of audience and context, and possibly many other factors.

4. Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the notions of culture, identity and beliefs; more specifically, the inter-relationship of cultural influence, writer identity and beliefs in ESL

writing. “Culture provides tools, habits, and assumptions that pervasively influence human thought and behavior” (Tweed & Lehman, 2002, p.89). The fundamental differences in Eastern and Western societies pertaining to education and writing contribute to the differences in thought patterns, rhetorical styles and discourse choice displayed in ESL writers’ texts. Despite language proficiency, ESL writers at both undergraduate and graduate levels encounter difficulties in their pursuit of establishing a successful writer identity in Western academic settings. Writer identity is not a singular notion; it is influenced by many factors. Writers alter their identities with different intentions. At the same time, writers are positioned by the contexts, and audiences in the contexts whose tastes decide the fate of the writing, and whose tastes they have to meet in order to accomplish the purpose of the writing.

The focus of this chapter is the cultural influence on textual features, which is only one of the streams of research on second language writing. What have not yet been examined are the micro and macro processes in ESL writing, which represent another parallel stream in this field, and which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Research on identity has focused on analyzing the product of writing but has not looked at the processes, especially the macro-process in relation to identity. To date, research has not focused on how writers’ identities affect the way that they write and the way they learn to write. However, the notion of beliefs is often articulated in discussions of the processes of writing. In the next chapter, I am going to bring the notions of beliefs and cultural identity together to show the inter-connection of the two.

Chapter 3

Processes in ESL Writing: Culture and Beliefs

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the influence of learners' first culture on the construction of writer identity, in particular ESL writer identity in a Western academic setting. The conclusion, based on the studies of students' written texts, indicates that ESL writer identity incorporates multiple influences and exhibits multiple aspects. In this chapter, I am going to focus on the processes of ESL writing, examining how cultural identity and the notion of multiple ESL writer identities is related to ESL writers' processes of composing (the micro-process) and learning to compose (the macro-process) such written texts.

To date, most of the process writing research has focused on the micro-process, studying how students produce a text by free writing, revising, peer reviewing, and the different beliefs about these strategies. However, researchers have not looked at the processes in terms of identity. Since in this research the processes of writing are discussed in relation to culture and identity, I will focus on a broader context, the macro-process, in which culture, identity and beliefs interact, shape and are shaped by each other. I will include micro-processes within the macro-process because micro-process is a part of macro-process; a series of micro-processes constitutes part of the macro-process. I would argue that the prerequisite for improvement of performance in the micro-process is the change of beliefs in the macro-process, which are more closely tied up to cultural perceptions.

In this chapter, I will first introduce the notion of beliefs and elaborate on the relationship of culture and beliefs. Beliefs of students and teachers in learning, teaching and writing will be discussed to lay a foundation for the subsequent discussions, in which factors influencing the evolution of students' beliefs pertaining to writing will be investigated.

2. Culture and learner beliefs

2.1 The notion of beliefs

The notion of belief has become popular in the field of ESL teaching in the past decade. Terms such as beliefs, values, attitudes, opinions, ideologies, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, dispositions and perspectives have been used to refer to similar concepts (Pajares, 1992). To clarify the “rather fuzzy usage” of the concept, M. Borg (2001) summarized the definition of belief as following:

A *belief* is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour (p.186).

This definition raises several points related to the understanding of beliefs. First is the distinction between belief and knowledge; second is that of stated beliefs (*espoused beliefs*) and actual beliefs (*beliefs-in-action*); third is the issue of conscious and unconscious beliefs, especially how unconscious beliefs are uncovered (p. 187). I will elaborate these three issues in the next section in relation to culture and identity.

2.2 Culture-based beliefs and cultural identity

The above definition to a certain degree embeds the relationship of beliefs in terms of culture and identity. People's knowledge of a culture and knowledge in a culture are related to their beliefs about the norms in that culture, and their attitudes toward other cultures. Because the way in which one acquires knowledge influences the way in which one sees the world, people's beliefs about the same conception may differ across cultures. Beliefs are an important part of culture; however, people can have beliefs about the way things are that are not necessarily those shared by everybody in the culture, and they can have beliefs that are shared by people in other cultures.

In chapter 2, I discussed the idea that individual identities within a culture are not homogeneous, but rather incorporate multiple sources of influence and multiple intentions. People position themselves and are positioned in terms of their identity according to different audiences and different contexts (Ivanic, 1994, 1997). People may choose particular identities to suit different audiences in different contexts. Beliefs can also be seen as having a similar quality. Although identity is who we feel we are and beliefs are about how we believe the world works, very often we do identify closely with our beliefs. Superficially, beliefs are easily interpreted as what people hold as true; however, people also alter their opinions on different occasions. The stated beliefs may not always portray constant underlying beliefs. It is not a matter of being dishonest, but a way of adapting themselves to the environment they are living in and to favor people they are with. Beliefs and identity therefore merge and interplay to shape the desired images of individuals so that they can be positioned properly by the people in that culture.

People's beliefs can be conscious or unconscious. The conscious part is that which can be articulated explicitly, and this part can also be artificial sometimes. The unconscious part is the portion that is deeply soaked into the person's cultural heritage. It is the voice that may not be loudly heard, but it may be uttered spontaneously in certain circumstances, and in either a natural or unexpected way.

Culture incorporates identity and beliefs. It plays an important role in shaping what a person is and what the person believes. There are big cultures and small cultures, national cultures and local cultures, as well as native cultures and foreign cultures. All these cultures are important elements in determining an individual's cultural identity and beliefs.

In academic settings, there are also academic cultures, in which students and teachers meet, with different cultural backgrounds and different beliefs, as well as different identities they wish to construct. This is one place where culture, identity and beliefs interconnect and interplay.

2.3 Learner beliefs

The notion of learner beliefs is an important issue in academic settings. Woods (in press) relates learner beliefs to action in the sense that "they influence decision, actions, events and interpretations of events" (p.206). Since learner beliefs influence students' interpretation and evaluation of activities taking place in the learning processes, differences in learner beliefs may result in different decisions and actions, and therefore different results in learning. In an ESL setting, students who move to another culture take with them the beliefs about the education system and the process of education, beliefs

about written texts, and about the processes of writing and learning, which may or may not match those in this Western academic setting. As a result, conflicts and disagreements may arise to add to the difficulties ESL learners have to overcome.

2.4 Culture-based beliefs about education

Education as a crucial part of culture, and as the vehicle to transmit and preserve culture, has been highly regarded in almost all the civilized world. However, ideologies underlying education may be culturally different, leading to different beliefs about education and different attitudes toward it. I noted in Chapter 2 that Nisbett et al.(2001) presented their “ancient Greek vs. ancient Chinese” framework by referencing Taoist elements which have had their influence on the patterns of thought and holistic cognition in Chinese culture. However, in terms of approaches to learning, the greatest ancient Eastern exemplar is Confucius, who has been regarded by many as the father of Chinese education.

Researchers have undertaken comparative studies to investigate the differences in Confucian and Socratic ideologies in terms of education. Tweed & Lehman (2002) compared and contrasted ideals for learning that are culturally more Chinese (Confucius) with those that are culturally more Western (Socratic). They maintained that “Socrates tended to question his own and others’ beliefs, evaluated others’ knowledge, esteemed self-generated knowledge, began teaching by implanting doubt, and sought knowledge for which he had good reasons” (p.90); whereas “Confucius was humanistic and sought to achieve societal harmony by encouraging virtuous activity” (p.89). What Confucius valued were “effortful learning, behavioral reform, pragmatic learning, acquisition of

essential knowledge, and respectful learning” (p.91). The purpose of classical Chinese learning is to cultivate a good personality through the practice of what has been absorbed, through the practice of “self-restraint and inner improvement” (Fang, 2002, p.47; Yu, 1984, p.35); therefore, the focus of learning is on “doing” rather than “knowing” in a practical sense. Scollon (1999) also investigated the fundamentally different cultural assumptions underlying teaching and learning between *Socratic* methods and *Confucian* methods. Sharp contrasts have been found between the two educational ideologies in terms of the goals, philosophical assumptions, use of language in communication and roles of teacher and students.

Since educational expectations and processes in L2 learners’ first and target language settings are culturally different, problems arise when students shift from one educational system to another and the normally shared cultural assumptions no longer obtain. (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991) “Culturally divergent attitudes” toward knowledge may result in divergent beliefs in teaching, learning and assessment. Ballard and Clanchy characterized East Asian education as “reproductive”, which is memory- and imitation-based; and Western education as “analytical”, which encourages critical thinking and questioning. As a result, Eastern teachers strive to impart “correct” answers to students, while their Western colleagues endeavor to initiate “originality” in students (pp.21-22). These culturally preferred approaches to learning are often most evident when written assignments are involved. Ballard and Clanchy explored the origin of the stereotype of the “plagiarizing overseas students” and attributed the reason to “the Asian duty to follow the words of past authorities and to reproduce the learning of acclaimed scholars” (p.31). Eastern teachers’ emphasis on memorizing and imitating appropriate texts evidently

account for students' lack of creativity and improper quoting in their writings. These characteristics become weaknesses in an Anglo-American educational setting where teachers evaluate students' writings with different criteria.

The knowledge-based nature of Chinese educational tradition leads to the emphasis on knowledge accumulation and internalization. Reading is regarded as the most important means to acquire knowledge and repetition is the key method to consolidate the learned knowledge and to deepen understanding of what has been learned (Yu, 1984). The purpose of knowledge accumulation is for sufficient preparation for future use. Learning for immediate needs is viewed negatively, being mocked in some household sayings such as "hugging Buddha's feet only when in urgent need", or "sharpening the sword when the enemy is in front". Yu (1984) compared this kind of knowledge accumulation to saving money in the bank and spending it later. "This idea goes against the theory of immediate needs as the starting point in learning" in Western societies (p.35).

Since learning is for the sake of self-enrichment and knowledge accumulation, there are two indispensable factors in the process of traditional Chinese learning: thinking and reviewing. Thinking while learning is highly valued following the Confucian doctrine "Learning without thought brings ensnarement". (Yu, 1984, p.35). Chinese students feel sure of something only when they have a thorough understanding of the use of words and structures. They only speak out when they feel sure what they say makes sense. Otherwise, they would rather be reticent. Students are not encouraged to produce utterances without careful thought (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Yu, 1984). To be safe, when they have to speak out, they do so by repeating exactly what has been told to them.

Reviewing is closely related to the accumulation of knowledge, as the Confucian doctrine goes, “By reviewing the old, one learns the new” (Yu, 1984, p.36). New things grow out of the old things; so is the same with knowledge. By going over the old knowledge, thinking it over, one will come to a new understanding, and thus acquire new knowledge. Since new knowledge is based on the mastery of old knowledge and the reflection upon it, “reviewing and recitation are regarded as the best ways to achieve real mastery of knowledge” (p.36).

Confucian ideologies pertaining to education have had a profound and persistent influence in China and, in a broader sense, in East Asian countries that have had close ties with traditional Chinese culture. (In this essay, the characteristics of Chinese culture are assumed to be generalizable to other East Asian countries mentioned in the text.) Traditional attitudes towards knowledge shape the preferred educational processes (Ballards & Clanchy, 1991), and further shape people’s beliefs about appropriate approaches to learning and teaching, and appropriate roles of the learner and the teacher.

2.5 Culture-based beliefs about written texts

In the field of ESL writing research, several issues have been much discussed in terms of cultural differences. Among them are the notion of individualism and the issue of plagiarism. People’s attitudes towards them are highly culture-based, leading to different beliefs regarding authorial presence and authorship in written text.

2.5.1 Beliefs about the issue of individualism in written texts

Individualism is a Western mainstream ideology. Ramanathan & Atkinson (1999) discussed it in relation to voice, critical thinking and textual ownership. The authors attributed the fundamental differences between Eastern and Western culture in these aspects to the diverse perceptions of individualism, which is highly valued in Western culture but is not valued in Eastern culture. In East Asian countries, being quiet is gold; therefore, a writer's "written voice that centrally assumes the expression of a 'unique inner self' may be problematic" for students from these cultures (p.51). In an academic setting where independent study and questioning is encouraged, L2 writers from more "interdependent orientated cultural backgrounds" are often accused of being uncritical in their thinking and writing. As far as textual ownership is concerned, Western educators who see instances of plagiarism as "violations of honor and morals" find it hard to tolerate texts produced by students from these cultures, in which the task of writing is not so much to "present an original, strong, individual self, but to show how much they have internalized of the transmittable traditions of their cultures" (p.63).

2.5.2 Beliefs about the issue of text borrowing in written texts

The issue of textual borrowing is a highly sensitive one, more sensitive than the presentation of individual voice in the text because it has one more layer of concern regarding moral values. Western researchers such as Ballard and Clanchy (1991), Currie (1998), Deckert (1993), Pennycook (1993, 1994), and Scollon (1994) all tackled this issue with different degrees of understanding of Asian cultural heritage. Deckert (1993) investigated the issue on a superficial level and found that Chinese freshmen at a Hong

Kong university had little familiarity with the Western notion of plagiarism. They were less able to recognize it, and were less concerned about the rights of the original writer. Plagiarism was not viewed as relevant to the issue of honesty, but as an indication of being weak and lazy. Deckert therefore suggested that explicit orientation and training on how to avoid plagiarism when writing in a Western academic community should be arranged for these first year students.

Pennycook (1994), in response to Deckert (1993), pointed out that plagiarism is a highly complicated issue, and should be understood as an umbrella term for a complex set of different issues. Educators need to have a sensitive understanding of Eastern students' cultural and educational backgrounds rather than be dismissive of traditional Chinese pedagogy as backward teaching practice. In addition, plagiarism needs to be understood "relative to the particular task, the assumed knowledge of the students, their language abilities, and the process of language learning" (p.282). Educators are advised to be more understanding and considerate with regard to Eastern students' different concept of plagiarism.

In support of Pennycook's notion of the complexity of the issue of plagiarism, Currie (1998) maintains that classroom instruction on plagiarism, though effective to a certain extent, fails to acknowledge the ambiguity surrounding textual borrowing as well as the language abilities of students. Efforts to discourage plagiarism should also include discussions of varying cultural notions of authorship and authority, and an understanding of students' "tasks and contexts and how their past strategies have contributed to their earlier successes" (p.12). Chinese discourse tradition allows direct quote from wide sources to show the author's knowledge. An apparent plagiarized piece of writing may be

the result of following the Asian culture in which quoting the authority and imitating sample texts are appreciated means of composing (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991) Obviously, many researchers have already recognized that the use of authority and sources may carry different meanings across cultures.

These are just two, but very important examples of culture-based beliefs about writing. The Western ideology of individualism values an explicit, unique authorial presence, and results in a confident and critical voice in the text. In contrast, the Eastern ideology of collectivism stresses an implicit, harmonious authorial presence, leading to a modest and constructive voice in writing. In addition, the Western sense of authorship reflects individualism from another aspect—individual authors and their contributions should be respected and acknowledged. In Eastern culture, however, since individual voice is often buried underneath the voice of the group, and on the other hand, authorities are highly admired, one way of expressing effectively is to speak through the mouth of authorities. These authorities are usually household names, so there is no need to indicate the source of information. Further, acknowledging the source may imply underestimation of readers' knowledge, and therefore in a sense, is an indication of conceit and stepping out of the group.

2.6 Culture-based beliefs about the process of composing written texts

Beliefs about the process of composing may also be culturally different. Some strategies used in the writing process, seemingly discrete from the notion of culture and identity, in fact have implicit connections with them. Take, for example, students' beliefs with regard to peer response and teacher feedback, which can be complicated and

different from the expectations of teachers, and which can be referable to their first cultural conventions.

2.6.1 Beliefs about peer response

Peer response, as illustrated in chapter 1, is an important activity in process writing classes, and is also a new one to many ESL students, especially those from Asian countries. The complexity of students' beliefs about peer response reflects their different educational backgrounds and cultural bearings. Different terms have been used to refer to similar concepts though with a different focus, such as *peer review* (with a focus on the process in which peers offer suggestions), *peer feedback* (with an emphasis on the comments given by peers), and *peer evaluation* (with more critical implications). Since they basically refer to the same process writing strategy, I will not differentiate them in my discussion.

Peer response is now commonplace in ESL writing classes, used as a complementary activity to teacher feedback in the revision process. However, research has indicated that students' beliefs about the effectiveness of peer response are complicated. One of the issue is whether students consider peer feedback as helping them improve their writing. Researchers have come to different conclusions concerning this issue. Mendonca & Johnson's (1994) study indicated that overall ESL students found peer review useful. However, students incorporated their peers' comments in their revisions selectively. Jacobs et al. (1998) endorsed the positive stance to peer feedback with the result of their study that students preferred to use peer feedback simultaneously combine with teacher feedback.

Leki & Carson (1994) surveyed undergraduates at a US university who were from a wide variety of countries and had taken English writing courses before they enrolled in regular courses. Although 49% of them indicated that they used peer review, this skill still received the lowest use rating of the 25 skills included in that survey question. This result implies a rather conservative attitude toward peer review. What is even worse is that Flynn's (1982, in Stanley, 1992) first year students offered unhelpful and unfocused responses to their peers' writing. In addition, students have the tendency of addressing only surface level errors such as those involving grammar, instead of more problematic issues of meaning. Their limited English competence may result in some rubber stamp comments such as "be specific", which may not make sense, when they are not sure what to say (Leki 1990, in Stanley 1992).

The other issue is whether ESL students believe that peer response is as important as teacher feedback. There seem even more arguments with regard to this question. Zhang (1995) reported that when asked to make a choice between either teacher feedback or peer or self-directed feedback, the overwhelming majority (94%) of the ESL students surveyed expressed a preference for teacher feedback. Nelson and Carson's (1998) study indicated the similar result that the Chinese and Spanish-speaking students both preferred the teachers' comments to those of their peers. In addition, students lamented that many of the problems their peers pointed out were at grammar and sentence-level, which were viewed as less effective in helping them say what they wanted to say. On the other hand, Jacobs et al. (1998) critiqued Zhang's (1995) methodology and indicated that from the results of their study, students preferred to have feedback from other students as one type

of feedback on their writing. However, their results also showed that students ranked teacher feedback higher than peer feedback.

The reason why I said at the beginning of this section that peer response may also be culture dependent is that there are instances when students from different educational backgrounds demonstrate divergent tendencies of beliefs in what-to-do and how-to-do with this activity. Nelson and Carson (1998) concluded that the Chinese and Spanish speakers they studied had different perceptions about the amount and kind of talk that was needed to identify problems. "Although the Chinese students perceived the goal of peer response as problem-identification, they were reluctant to identify problems, recognising, it seems, that making negative comments on a peer's draft leads to division, not cohesion, in a group" (p.128). This can also be related to different communication styles across cultures, which further complicate group work significantly. From a culture where group harmony is more important than individual opinion, students' responses can be very different from those in a culture that value individual endeavour. Peer reviewing to Chinese students, is not a preferred strategy in writing because it is a much more important issue for students to preserve the peers' face, maintain group harmony, and to appear modest (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999).

2.6.2. Beliefs about teacher feedback

The effect of teacher feedback on the composing process as part of a multi-draft strategy is widely recognized in almost all learning contexts though disagreements may exist with some points. Teacher feedback generally plays a positive role despite its explicitness. Ferris & Roberts (2001) investigated 72 university ESL students of differing

abilities self-editing their texts across three feedback conditions. The results indicated that the two groups of students who received explicit (codes) and implicit (no-codes) error feedback significantly outperformed the no-feedback group on the self-editing task. However, there were no significant differences between the “codes” and “no-codes” groups, which implied that the explicitness in feedback was of little significance in helping students to self-edit.

In the second language context, teachers’ more specific, idea-based and meaning-level comments lead to substantial students’ revisions that improve the quality of writing. Teacher feedback on multiple drafts is particularly effective in promoting students’ revision (Paulus, 1999). However, when there exist mismatches between teachers’ perceived proper feedback and the students’ needs, teachers’ praise may erode trust, and teachers’ criticism may lead to resistance to further improvement. Students may be disillusioned by the fact that they get low marks in tests but have received positive feedback on their writing. They may become cynical and consider all the positive feedback from the teacher as insincere (Hyland, 1998).

There also exist differing beliefs with regard to the types of feedback that are supposed to work better. Hyland & Hyland (2001) analyzed the written feedback given by two teachers to ESL students. The two teachers were found to employ praise most frequently for the purpose of softening criticism and suggestions. Moreover, many criticisms and suggestions were mitigated by using hedging devices, question form and personal attribution. Despite their good intentions, the authors pointed out, the effect of their mitigation often led to ambiguity in meaning to the students, sometimes creating

confusion and incomprehension. Some students in fact preferred negative comments that showed them exactly where their problems were (Nelson & Carson, 1998).

In fact, students' beliefs about teacher feedback partly encode their cultural perceptions of the roles of the teacher and the learner. In Confucian precepts, teachers are authorities; therefore, teachers' feedback should be respected. Meanwhile, teachers should be strict. It is the teacher's fault if students do not write properly. As a result, negative feedback is considered "the bitter medicine that cures the disease". Moreover, teachers' ambiguous feedback may wave students' beliefs in the authority of the teacher because it can be interpreted as the teacher's inability to see the problems.

2.7 Culture-based beliefs about the process of learning to compose written texts

Students' beliefs about the learning process in writing can be reflected in their beliefs about what a good teacher and a good learner should be because learning in an instructional setting mainly involves the efforts and interaction of the teacher and the learner.

2.7.1 Beliefs about good teachers

For students from East Asian countries, their perceptions of a good teacher can be different from those in the Western world. In keeping with the traditional (Confucian) notion of the purpose of teaching as transmitting knowledge, the perception of good teachers, first of all, is that they have profound knowledge in their subject area. They should be very learned and be able to answer all sorts of questions students raise. Teachers are compared to "the fount of knowledge", "a key to the treasure house of

knowledge” in some household sayings. In Cortazzi and Jin’s (1996) questionnaire survey, the overwhelming majority of the Chinese students understood a good teacher as having deep knowledge of his or her subjects, but the students paid much less attention to teachers’ pedagogical skills.

Another quality of good teachers is that they should be very responsible for and patient to students. They should be “as strict as a father, and as kind as a mother”. This traditional view may also in part account for Chinese students’ tendency to approach their teachers after class instead of raising questions in class. Teachers who are only available in the classroom are not respected by students as much as those who go out of their way to offer help and advice outside the classroom, both academically and non-academically (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996).

In addition, a good teacher should also be a moral example for students to follow. This again matches the Confucian value that the teacher should be viewed as “sacred” (Yu, 1984, p.37). This value has influenced Chinese educational culture for centuries. It has also influenced other East Asian societies for centuries. For example, Nash (1961, in Ballard and Clanchy, 1991) described the teacher’s role in a Burmese village school as “one of great respect”, and “the repository of knowledge”. The teacher “leads the students forward into knowledge. ... Couple this with the prevalent belief that knowledge is a fixed, or nearly fixed thing, to be transmitted from a respected elder to a subordinate junior...”(p.24). With this image of the teacher and this belief of learning, the teaching method is tailored to “stuff the mind, to train the memory, and to fix a respect for what is known” (p.25). Such an approach, which is typical of and comparable to that of other

Eastern countries, differs dramatically from the teaching methods prevailing in the Western world, which are student-centered and communication-oriented.

2.7.2 Beliefs about good learners

The beliefs about good learners match the expectations of good teachers. First of all, “love of learning has always been central to the Confucian definition of a good student” (Lee, 2000, p.544). Working hard to memorize the knowledge that the teacher imparts is the basic requirement for a good student.

Now that the teacher is treated parentally, another quality of a good student, according to Confucius, is showing respect for and obedience to the teacher or the master (Lee, 2000). (A traditional saying goes: the person who is my teacher for one day will be respected as my father all my life.) Students are expected to accept, not to question what the teacher teaches. This learning approach explains why Chinese students are perceived as not being critical in thinking and writing. Further, students are expected to follow the teachings of a master (Lee, 2000), based on the beliefs that the teacher is also the model of knowledge and morality (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Lee, 2000; Yu, 1984).

Chinese students are also encouraged to contribute their thoughts in class, but the nature of their opinions may differ from those of Western students. Chinese students are supposed to give thoughtful opinions after sound reflection, whereas Western students tend to speak spontaneously (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Since less thoughtful suggestions may be undervalued by classmates, students would rather keep silent when they are not sure of their contribution to classroom learning. This characteristic can become an evident handicap when students are asked to do peer conferencing and peer evaluation.

While teachers' intentions are to train students to become critical writers through these activities, students may think more of the issue of authority, as well as the issues of face and group harmony: they are afraid of losing face and being singled out of the group in public.

3. The evolution of learner beliefs

Although beliefs are "relatively resistant to change" (Woods, in press, p.215), they do change when students have to adapt themselves to the new learning context. The evolving process of their beliefs is influenced by multiple sources in addition to their own knowledge expansion and ideological changes in terms of education. Teachers as the principal agent in an instructional setting may exert strong influence on the evolution of learner beliefs.

3.1 The influence of teacher beliefs on the evolution of learner beliefs

In instructional settings, it is not only learner beliefs that are important; teachers' beliefs, which usually play a crucial role in shaping and reshaping students' beliefs, should also be taken into account.

3.1.1 The notion of teacher beliefs

The term teachers' beliefs is usually used to refer to teachers' pedagogical beliefs, that is, their beliefs about teaching, learning, subject matter, and the roles of the learner and the teacher (S. Borg, 1999; Calderhead, 1995; Johnson, 1995; Pajares, 1992; Woods,

1996). Teachers certainly have beliefs about matters beyond their profession (Pajares, 1992), but in this thesis, only teachers' beliefs concerning education will be discussed.

Woods (1996) proposed the term teachers' BAK, that is, teachers' beliefs, assumption and knowledge in his studies. He clarified that the terms beliefs, assumption and knowledge, although treated in his book as separate entities, are rather "points on a spectrum of meaning". The term *knowledge* is used to refer to "things we 'know'—conventionally accepted facts"; the term *assumption* refers to "the (temporary) acceptance of a 'fact' (state, process or relationship)" which we are not sure of but are taken as true for the time being; and the term *beliefs* refers to "an acceptance of a proposition" that may not be agreed upon unanimously (p.195). These conceptions are of an interwoven nature and may overlap with each other, and make their distinctions blurred. However, teachers alter their views and adapt their teaching to new situations based on the integration of the three.

Teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards teaching have evolved from their own learning, working and possibly life experiences, and on an ongoing basis. Any specific event may change their views on learning and teaching and eventually alter their approaches in learning and teaching (Johnson, 1995; Woods, 1996). Woods' (1996) study of ESL teachers in North America indicated that teachers' beliefs, assumptions and knowledge are changing and evolving all the time through their earlier and later learning and teaching experiences.

Johnson (1995) explored the nature of teachers' *professional knowledge* and their *theoretical beliefs* about learning and teaching that form teachers' frames of reference. She assumed that "teachers enter classrooms with a great deal of knowledge about

teachers, teaching, learning and students” (p.32). This knowledge is based on teachers’ apprenticeship of observation, language learning experiences, teacher education programs, and even prior teaching experiences; and “this knowledge is likely to change over time” (p.33). At the same time, teachers’ theoretical beliefs evolve from prior experiences and tend to be “stable and rather resistant to change” (p.33). These beliefs function as “filters through which teachers make instructional judgements and decisions” (p.33), in other words, teachers teach in accordance with these beliefs.

3.1.2 The influence of teacher beliefs

The influence of teacher beliefs is most evident in structured classroom settings. Teachers are considered by Wajnryb (1992) as the principal agent of change in language teaching, and the classroom as their natural habitat, where their experience is based and where their growth takes effect. In her point of view, “The language classroom is the primary *source of information* out of which teachers will develop their own personal philosophy of what makes effective teaching and learning. It is also the domain where they will find out about their professional roles and responsibilities” (p.13).

The teacher as the most important individual in the classroom, especially in the ESL classroom where “the teacher is the only native or near-native speaker of the language” (Johnson, 1995; p.16), has profound influence on the learning taking place in the classroom, and on students’ beliefs of what learning should be, as well as the outcome of the learning. Pennington et al. (1996) suggested that teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward a certain teaching practice also affected their students’ learning. Their research indicated that the response of students to the innovative project of process writing was

related to the effectiveness of the teacher's implementation of the project. In the classes with the most positive outcome, the teachers were the most enthusiastic. On the other hand, in classes with the most negative response, the teachers held skeptical attitudes toward process writing. The teachers' enthusiasm and commitment to their work and students were transferred to their students either consciously or unconsciously. As a result of this, students' writing progress demonstrated a divergent trend during the implementation of the project. Pennington et al. therefore quoted Edge (1996) who argued that "teachers of English as a second language should become more conscious of the ways in which their individual characteristics and beliefs affect their students' learning." (Pennington et al., 1996, p.241).

The methodology teachers adopt to a great extent reflects teachers' beliefs, which are determined by their previous educational background, their knowledge of the subject matter, and their work experiences. In ESL settings in North America, teachers have popularly dropped the traditional method in writing classes, in which writing is viewed as "a performance medium where learners display what they've learned" (Donaldson, 1990, p.26). Instead, process writing has become the main trend in writing classrooms. Teachers view themselves as guides who lead students to integrate all their language skills in the process of producing a written text. The final product is not the focus, but the process through which students work towards the final product is. The underlying belief is that students learn to write by writing, by developing strategies on their own, by discovering meaning through personal or group effort. This can be interpreted as an indication of Western individualism--individuals have different abilities in writing; the quality of their products can be very different as a result of differing writing competence.

However, the stress on the process encourages students to discover their strengths, weaknesses and progress through drafting, reviewing and many other activities. The focus on process therefore is a focus on individuals' progress through practice. Such beliefs serve as a guideline for teachers to design their classroom activities such as multi-drafting and peer reviewing, which they consider as important in developing students' writing skills.

Teachers' beliefs pertaining to writing can also be reflected in the feedback they give to students. Teachers may focus on meaning level suggestions or surface level corrections. Teachers may use more positive feedback or more negative comments. The nature of teachers' feedback may influence students' beliefs about the focus of writing, the criteria of good writing and the efficient ways of achieving good writing skills.

3.2 The influence of individual differences on the evolution of learner beliefs

Apart from the influence of teachers' beliefs, the evolution of learner beliefs is further complicated by individual differences, that is, each learner's language proficiency and personal characteristics.

3.2.1 Learner beliefs and language proficiency

In addition to culture-based beliefs about education and writing, as well as the influence of teachers' beliefs, ESL students' language proficiency also makes a difference in their process of evolving beliefs about writing.

ESL writers' English proficiency affects the quality and the composing process of their writing. Silva (1997) reviewed studies concerning the differences in ESL and native-

English-speaker (NES) writing. Some of the findings included the following. At the discourse level, ESL writers made more errors overall, their texts were shorter in word count than their NES counterparts, and their texts exhibited less lexical variety and were less effective. In the composing process, they wrote with more difficulty, but reread and rewrote less due to a lack of lexical resources. Silva's (1997) own empirical study also endorsed the same fact. For writers with limited English proficiency, problems with vocabulary and grammar are evident in their writings. The ESL subjects' texts exhibited a simpler style, shorter sentences, less subordination and noun modification, fewer passives, and less lexical variety and sophistication. In Park's (1988) study, the native-Chinese language group produced a less complex style of written discourse than did the native-English language group. The former used a significantly lower ratio of free modifiers than did the latter. As a result of their limited English proficiency, they paid more attention to lexical and sentence level problems in writing. The acceptance of teachers' beliefs about process writing is usually influenced by deficiency in language.

Students' English level may influence their attitudes towards innovative teaching approaches to writing, which in turn leads to different results in their English writing skills. Students' reactions fell apart in terms of an innovative process writing project in the study of Pennington et.al. (1996): some classes demonstrated a positive reception of the process writing innovation, while others had negative experience in this regard. The groups with the most positive response were classified as high- and mid-achieving groups whereas those students who had the most negative reception fell in the mid- to low-achieving range. The positive reception by students in high achieving classes may be related to higher language proficiency and confidence in trying new things (p.239).

3.2.2 Individual characteristics and the evolving learner beliefs

Apart from English proficiency, ESL writers' unique, inherent personality and their sense of representing themselves in a proper way may also make a difference in evolving beliefs and constructing identity in their academic writing. The student's "strong ego" and "keen sense of audience" in Johns' (1992, p.196) study allowed her to produce excellent academic work. Her ability to make analogies about tasks, to understand the nature of higher order thinking skills, to exploit models and to structure new discourse was derived from her rational approach to cultural acquisition. At the same time, the pleasure she has found in coming to terms with this foreign culture released her from "a slavish adaptation" to a new culture (p.195). She was able to maintain her voice as a person and as a Lao, yet vary that voice to meet the needs of the new Western sociocultural situation.

In Shen's (1989) case, her clear consciousness of the role shifting from her Chinese self to her English self, the self that people perceive she should be in her writing, enabled her to meet the Western academic expectations. It was a confusing process, but she went through the quandaries and reached a higher plateau in her English composition. The three graduate subjects in Hirvela and Belcher's (2001) article also felt the urgency of learning how to represent themselves in English academic writing. They were determined to have their voice heard, despite the fact that their voice was sometimes muted. In all cases, it seems to me that a positive attitude to their voice helps them survive an academic world that they have to come to terms with.

However, individuals are not unanimously able to adapt to the specialized language in their fields. Casanave (1992) argued that in the Western graduate school context, the school language became very abstract, logical and specialized, “and thus distant from everyday language, in accordance with conventions in different fields and disciplines.” (p.153) To many novices entering a specialized program, it was a puzzling and uncomfortable feeling to learn those abstract “code words” (p.160) and theories. In the article, the subject Virginia found that the gap between her perception and her professors’ requirement of English academic writing was too big for her to bridge. She withdrew from her PhD program because she was not able to view the world through the “pipeline” (p.166) of her professor’s and find a balance between her own world and the disciplinary community that she entered.

3.3 The mismatch of beliefs and the evolution of beliefs

General beliefs about education and writing in a certain culture play a crucial role in shaping the beliefs of people in that culture. As a result of their cultural background, students from Asian countries may not share the beliefs of their teachers in a Western academic context.

Although teachers in general retain control over the structure and content of classroom events, it has to be admitted that the success of any classroom event depends largely on how students perceive and respond to them. “[S]tudents’ perceptions of themselves, their teachers, and classroom events and their role in those events, act as a filter between what is taught and what is learned” (Johnson, 1995, p.52). If students are able to accurately perceive teachers’ intentions of setting certain tasks and expectations

for the students, then learning can be enhanced. However, coming from different cultural and educational backgrounds, ESL students are faced with dual tasks. They have to study not only the language, but also the “code of conduct” (p.52) expressed implicitly by the teacher and other people in this target language environment. It is hard for them to see exactly through the lens of the teacher.

Nunan (1989) investigated the disparity between the teacher’s intended outcome of a task and the learners’ actual gain from it. He asserted that

Learning outcomes will be influenced by learners’ perceptions about what they should contribute, their views about the nature and demands of the task, and their definitions of the situation in which the task takes place. Additionally, we cannot know for certain how different learners are likely to carry out a task. We tend to assume that the way we look at a task will be the way learners look at it. However, there is evidence that we as teachers are focusing on one thing, learners are focusing on something else. (p.20)

A case in point supporting this stance was Liu’s (1996) study. The two learners did not appreciate whole class discussions in their oral class, in which “the teacher expected students to volunteer answers and comments, and as well as to self-initiate participation” (p.60), whereas these two learners were waiting to be called upon to speak. Misled by their native cultural educational norms, they were unable to understand the open negotiation this activity was meant for. This prevented them from making an effort to participate actively in class.

However, learner beliefs are constantly evolving. The beliefs students hold are to a great extent apt to change as they progress toward higher goals and as they shift to a new context of learning. Compared to the beliefs of teachers, students’ beliefs are much more unstable and more changeable. For example, Brousseau (1996) noticed that students

in the class she observed had different reactions to native speakers' and ESL writers' work. At the beginning, students paid more attention to grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure. However, through the effort of the teacher, they learned to look critically at other aspects of writing later on.

However, the evolution of learner beliefs is a complex process. Since learners have already possessed some knowledge structures before they enter a university classroom, especially in an ESL setting, they may have some very different or even "idiosyncratic" understandings from "those presupposed by the teacher" (Woods, in press, p.224). If teachers are able to see the interwoven complexity of learner beliefs, the evolution of learner beliefs will be facilitated with teachers' extended help.

4 Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the notion of learner beliefs and what learner beliefs are pertaining to culture, education, and some crucial but controversial issues which exist in Eastern and Western academic settings. These issues include individualism and plagiarism in written texts, peer response and teacher feedback in the composing process, and role perceptions of the teacher and the learner in the learning process. All of these issues represent different cultural heritages and eventually influence the evolution of learner beliefs in an ESL context in which students have to learn a set of new conventions and restructure their belief systems in order to survive in Western academia. In the evolving process, teachers as the most important individuals in relation to learners, play an important role in reshaping learners' beliefs. At the same time, individual characteristics of learners further complicate the evolution.

Chapter 4

The Studies of Culture, Identity and Beliefs in ESL Writing

1. Introduction

In chapter 2, I discussed the influence of culture on the construction of writer identity, and how the multiple identities of ESL writers have been shaped by multiple sources. In Chapter 3, I introduced the notion of beliefs in relation to culture and identity. Beliefs of ESL students and teachers were examined, and factors influencing the evolution of ESL writers' beliefs were discussed. In light of the literature reviewed in the preceding chapters, I will outline a study I undertook querying the cultural influence on the construction of writer identity and the evolution of writer beliefs in the micro and macro processes of ESL writing.

I employed a qualitative approach; to be more specific, a case study approach. The overall study was composed of two cases. I will call them Case A and Case B for convenience of narration and discussion. The rationale for investigating two cases with a qualitative approach will be provided in the first section. Methodologies for data collection and data analysis will be discussed when each case is dealt with.

In this study, I examined both the product and the processes of ESL writing. I collected the product data, namely, the participants written texts first in Case A. In analyzing the product data, I came to realize the importance of the micro and macro processes, so I started to collect the process data in both Case A and Case B.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Rationale for the two case studies

I started the study with Case A, which aimed at examining the cultural influence and writer identity reflected in a Chinese ESL learner's writing. The study began with the collection and analysis of the texts produced by the participant, but continued through to the examination of the processes through which she produced these texts and through which she learned specific and general skills in English writing. To be able to explore more in-depth the writer identity created in the micro and macro-processes, I designed a second study which began at the later stage of Case A and having a shorter duration.

Case A involved an on-going study of an ESL student during an entire term. The goal was to examine how the participant's first language and culture influenced her writing in English in a Canadian academic setting, and how she struggled to change her perceptions of writing in order to establish a successful ESL writer identity within a short period after her arrival in Canada. It became evident during the undertaking of this research that issues of identity were reflected not only in the final products of her writing, but also in how she experienced the process of writing and the process of learning to write. The participant I needed for this study was one who had already established a successful first language writer identity before coming to Canada, and one who held being a successful writer in English as an important priority.

During the process of Case A, it became evident that the learner's second language writing was constantly led by the norms pertaining to writing in her first culture. In her attempt to establish a successful second language writer identity, she was experiencing a confusing evolution period of beliefs about language learning and

academic writing. What came out of Case A were the cultural aspects of beliefs and how these influenced writing in an instructional setting. As a result of my teaching experience, I tended to focus on learning in the instructional setting. Therefore, based on the themes surfacing from Case A, I started Case B with the intention to look at developing writing ability in the instructional setting. To do this, I wanted to examine the beliefs of the students and the teacher in the second language writing classroom, and how culture and beliefs shaped and reflected each other in the micro and macro-process of writing. In this case, the focus was on beliefs, but the beliefs were not treated as independent from culture because beliefs are learned through culture. They intertwine and interplay, making their distinctions blurry and the situations related to them complicated.

Case B was based on my observations of a non-credit ESL writing class and interviews with the teacher and four students. In this study, I mainly looked at how the teacher's and students' beliefs have evolved from their cultural and educational experiences, and how these beliefs played a role in the processes of students' ESL writing. Since this was a non-credit course, students' English level was comparatively low. They had all completed secondary education, some already in undergraduate programs, in their home countries. As a result, they must have formed some perceptions of language learning and writing based on their first cultural conventions. However, it was felt that due to the deficiency in both the English language and writing, they might be more receptive to the beliefs of their teacher. I assumed that this was a good setting to investigate the evolution of beliefs in the micro and macro processes of ESL writing. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, beliefs about the components of the micro-process will

affect the macro-process. On the other hand, beliefs about the macro-process also affect students' performance in micro-process activities.

In Case A, I was originally undertaking a professional activity as a writing tutor. As I was witnessing the struggles of the participant, I realized that her case was precisely what I wanted to study. I therefore decided to develop it as an "action research" (Woods & Reynolds, 1996) project allowing my questions and findings fed back into the process. I tackled the participant's struggles and changes, and included myself as a researcher. The process of instruction was part of the data collection and part of the research. My research methodology also evolved while this study was going on. As a result, I added a new study to elaborate on some of the questions that came out of Case A.

2.2 Rationale for a qualitative approach

A qualitative approach to inquiry features an emphasis on an emergent research design process. "Data analysis is an early and ongoing research activity, with the results from early data analysis guiding subsequent data collection efforts" (Maykut, Pamela & Morehouse, 1994, p.144). Since the processes of data collection and data analysis were tightly interwoven (Ertmer, 1997), the early analysis efforts in Case A directed the subsequent data collection in Case B. In Case B, I mainly looked at the cultural influence on the beliefs of the learners and the teacher in an ESL class in students' processes of learning to write in English. In my analysis of this case, product was not my focus; instead, my interest was mainly in the micro and macro processes of writing and the relationship between them.

Seidel (1998) stated that qualitative data analysis is a process of noticing, collecting and thinking. However, the process is not linear. It has the following characteristics. 1. The process is *iterative* and *progressive* because it is a cycle that keeps repeating like an infinite spiral. 2. The process is *recursive* because one part can call you back to a previous part as a result of the new insights gained at that stage. 3. The process is *holographic* in that each step in the process contains the entire process; the initial noticing may simultaneously involve collecting and thinking of the issue concerned (pp.1-5). During the process of the whole study, data collection and data analysis were undertaken at the same time; the insights from the analysis of earlier data motivated me to explore relevant issues further. All these processes were interlocking and inter-promoting to reach a higher circle on the spiral. It is for this reason that Case B was added to the study at a later point in time.

2.3 Participants and contexts

2.3.1 Case A

The participant in Case A was Min (a pseudonym), a Chinese first year student who was taking a credit course in EAP. At the same time, she was taking a credit course in Film Studies, which was her minor. She had been in Canada for only a month when she first came to consult me at the Writing Tutorial Service about her English writing assignments. The driving force for her to seek external help was the anxiety caused by the poor grades she received for her assignments. I have been in close touch with her since then, collected all her written assignments and interviewed her while I was helping her with her studies.

Compared to other ESL learners I have known in this university, she was courageous or perhaps foolhardy by starting her degree program right after she arrived in Canada, without familiarizing herself with the Western academic environment. She was in her early twenties and was admitted to a key Chinese university before she came to Canada. This was an indication that she had excellent first language writing skills and good knowledge of English language because these are very important components of the National University Entrance Exam in China. Her discourse in the interviews also supported my assumption of her first language writer identity. She had studied in that Chinese university for a year, then she switched to a Canadian university to study Computer Mathematics. Her reason for choosing Film Studies as her first course in Canada sounded rather naive. She thought that all she had to do for this course was watch movies and discuss with classmates in a leisurely and pleasant way. This seemed much easier than taking a course in Computer Mathematics that might involve many specialized terms that were hard for her to understand. The reality, however, was astonishingly beyond her expectation as she found out soon after entering the program.

During the period of Case A, witnessing the struggles and confusions experienced by Min concerning different perceptions about writing and writer identity, I started to think of other ESL students in the program who were from China or other East Asian countries. Not all ESL students were able to get extra help. It might shed more light on my understanding of their evolving processes by observing the way they negotiate with their teachers and the processes through which they acquire the basic knowledge of Western academic conventions. For this concern, I started to conduct Case B in an ESL

writing class at the same university. The focus was directed at examining the teacher's and learners' beliefs pertaining to writing, and how these beliefs influenced students' micro and macro processes in English writing.

2.3.2 Case B

The setting for Case B was an ESL writing class at the same Canadian university as Case A. Pseudonyms were used for all participants. The teacher, Jane, has been teaching ESL at this university for sixteen years. She studied Spanish in Canada in a foreign language setting. She speaks Danish as a result of her stay in Denmark in her earlier years. She started to teach ESL in 1986. During her years of teaching, she has witnessed "different waves of students" from Eastern Asian countries. Through these different waves, Jane was able to get in touch with students from divergent cultures and understand their problems in language learning. The four students interviewed were Julia, Robert, Betty and Glen; they were all from East Asian countries. They had been in Canada for only a couple of months. Except Robert, the three of them were already in college or university programs in their home countries. For Betty, who was Taiwanese, and Glen, who was Korean, their purpose for coming to Canada was to improve their English. They were going back to their home countries to continue their undergraduate study upon completion of this ESL program. However, Betty and Robert, the two Chinese students, planned to stay and enter a degree program in Canada. These learners were all well motivated to make the best out of their learning in this writing class.

2.4 Data collection

2.4.1 Case A

The product

The data I collected at the initial stage of the study were mainly the written assignments Min had completed for both courses, some already marked, others to be submitted. Her English was good compared to her knowledge of Western education. She had fewer problems with language per se as far as vocabulary and grammar were concerned. However, the poor marks she received in both her English and Film Studies courses indicated a severe discrepancy in her English writing. The identity she established in writing clearly reflected her first language writer characteristics. What she needed to remedy more urgently than English language was some basic knowledge about Western education, such as the fundamental assumptions about learning and teaching, students' learning styles, teachers' expectations, and how to meet the requirements of a Western university.

Her later writing was collected on an on-going basis while we met regularly in either the tutoring sessions or the interviews. Collecting data longitudinally provided information about the processes I was interested in. These writings can be viewed as the products of her progressing writing skills in the micro and macro processes at certain points. The product in essence is dependent on the process, no matter micro or macro. The improvement in many micro-processes inevitably smoothes and speeds up the progress in the macro-process, and hence result in the improved quality of the ultimate product.

As a result, I collected all the written tasks she completed for her ESL and Film

Studies courses during the summer term. Her writings for the ESL program contained some short essays and five entries in a personal response journal, each requiring a different style of writing such as letter, report, critique, and so on. For Film Studies, she had taken an in-class test, and written a shot-by-shot analysis and an essay.

The micro-process

Through the tutoring sessions and interviews related to a certain text, I recorded all the instances that I thought would be helpful to my research and her study either by taking field notes or by tape-recording. The tutoring sessions usually focused on a certain assignment or a certain genre of writing that she had problems with. It was more diagnostically structured learning to her. The interviews involved mainly open and semi-structured questions and conversations relevant to the interests of both of us. Our regular meetings allowed us to re-examine what had been articulated in the previous meetings, and clarify potential misunderstandings of the data. Since we shared the same first language and culture, I was also advantaged in interpreting the data in greater detail, and at the same time, was able to pinpoint her problems and offer more effective suggestions.

The macro-process

This longitudinal study also provided me with the opportunity to observe her progress in the macro-process of learning to write in a Western academic setting. In other words, I was able to capture the cultural aspects and beliefs related to education reflected in her written and spoken discourse, and how these influenced her learning processes in the target language. Her attitude towards the teacher and classmates, towards some

popular strategies used in the writing class, as well as the way she perceived certain assignments was obviously under the influence of her previous educational background and her first cultural presuppositions. From her assignments and our discussions, I perceived her extreme frustration at the early stage and her gradual and steady progress later as she was coming to terms with Western academic conventions pertaining to writing. The process of data collection also reflected the process of her struggle out of the quandary of second language writing. Her diligence and persistence, coupled with her sensitivity gained through my instructions on the requirements for each assignment, different styles of Western academic writing, as well as the gaps between her native and English cultures and educational expectations, resulted in her final success in establishing a proper writer identity that satisfied both herself and her teachers.

2.4.2 Case B

In this case, the triangulation of data was achieved by using multiple data collection methods and data sources to enhance the validity of the findings (Ertmer, 1997, p.169). Data were drawn from four classroom observations and two interviews with the students and their teacher respectively. Field notes were taken during the observations, and all the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

The first interview with both the teacher and the students mainly involved some global questions concerning the macro-process such as those about the subjects' language learning (and teaching in the teacher's case) experiences, their cultural backgrounds, their opinions on the teaching method and explicit grammar instruction. There were also a few micro-process questions such as those about teacher feedback on writing and so on.

The first interview with the four students was a semi-structured group interview with open-ended questions prepared in advance, leaving room for the participants to volunteer spontaneous, relevant information at their preference. It was also conducted in such a way because that students had only met me once in my first class observation prior to the interview; they might feel uncomfortable to talk to a “stranger” (Rounds, 1996, p.45) one on one although they were interested in my research and volunteered to be interviewees. The group interview was intended to reduce the pressure on them so that their answers were more reliable. The subconscious intention of doing this also derived from my understanding of East Asian culture: students may feel safer when in a group.

The classroom observation served as a means to examine whether and how the beliefs posited on the part of the teacher and the students in the first interview were reflected in classroom activities. Some of these activities included analyzing the introduction and conclusion of an article, learning to use CD-ROM for information, analyzing argumentative writing, in-class log writing and peer evaluation. The classroom observation was also used as a cue for eliciting questions for the second interview. At the same time, it was also a “multi-faceted tool for learning” (Wajnryb, 1992; p.1) for me as a researcher because the experience of observing comprised not only the time actually spent in the classroom, but also the preparation for it and the follow-up analysis and reflection on the whole experience.

The second interview was arranged after the class observation, centering on more specific questions concerning some micro-process strategies employed in class. Since the questions were more focused on certain activities observed in class, people other than the participants might be mentioned. For the consideration of confidentiality, the participants

were interviewed separately. The results of such considerations were satisfactory. Since the questions were all based on the classroom activities the students were involved in, they felt more empowered to give their opinions. Individual interviews also made it possible for participants to speak out without being interrupted. For some reason, Robert was not able to come to the interview. The information elicited from the second interviews was based on the comments from Julia, Glen and Betty.

Through the interviews, it was obvious that the teacher had strong beliefs based on her learning and teaching experience. The interviews with her were insightful, and elicited many beliefs underlying her teaching practice, some concerning the micro-process (such as those of free writing, peer feedback and revision) and others concerning the macro-process (such as those of learner independence and cultural factors) of ESL writing.

2.5 Data analysis

2.5.1 Case A

In analyzing the data in Case A, I mainly used the interpretational approach (Ertmer, 1997, p.158) to examine the data for salient themes identified. As noted above, data collection was an on-going process; at the same time, data were analyzed so that what was learned from data collected at one point in time could be used to determine subsequent data collection activities (p.158). The participant's written and spoken discourse were the focus of my analysis, which included her written assignments and the teachers' comments on them, as well as the notes I took concerning her puzzles, beliefs and changes that she articulated during our meetings. The themes I identified at one stage

could be clarified and confirmed at subsequent meetings. However, the themes were not inferred from direct questions at the surface level, which might potentially lead her to articulate something that would meet my expectations. Instead, each time we focused on a certain assignment, discussing her problems and the reasons for these problems, as well as the teacher's expectations and how to meet these expectations. I tried to capture the underlying themes that recurred frequently by working on concrete tasks. For example, the disjunction of cultural conventions pertaining to education was reflected in the Film Studies' written test, in the proposal to Microsoft company, and in the critique of an article. Some of these themes appeared evident during the process of cyclical analysis (Lee, 2001); some surfaced at the end of the study when I put all the data together to crosscheck.

2.5.2 Case B

Data analysis of Case B started with broad descriptions of what I noticed in classroom observations and transcripts of the taped interviews. "Coding" of the data was used as an "heuristic tool" to facilitate discovery and further investigation (Seidel, 1998, p.3). Then data were disassembled, sorted and sifted. At this stage, I again used the interpretational approach (Ertmer, 1997) to identify salient themes which were categorized by highlighting similarities (Maxwell & Miller, 1992) of the instances articulated by the teacher and the students concerning their beliefs about learning and writing in particular.

3. Results

3.1 Results of Case A

In analyzing the data in Case A, a recurring theme was the notion of identity, both in the participant's written texts, and in the micro and macro processes of her writing. The processes within which Min developed her writer identity were particularly examined. Her struggles, confusions, and progress in understanding and constructing a successful ESL writer identity revealed the hardship typically experienced by many Chinese students entering North American higher learning.

3.1.1 Product: cultural influence and awkward identity

The data from this case revealed a disjunction between the subject's view of higher education and academic writing and that of her teachers. In the beginning period, this was the biggest barrier to her success at this Canadian university. In the first place, her understanding of university study still rested on taking class notes and memorizing subject-specific terms and facts. This could be seen from her first in-class test for the course *Introduction to Film Studies*. She did pretty well in section 1 *Terminology*, which asked her to give precise descriptions of the terms. However, she scored very low in the second section *Short Questions*. She lost most marks in "how" questions, whose answers were not readily available in her notebook or textbook but had to be formulated based on her understanding of the theories and specific films. The inability to do independent thinking was evident in this test and caused her huge panic.

In the second place, her native cultural rhetorical styles that were divergent from the target culture also presented a challenge. Her first journal for the ESL Writing Process

class was poorly accepted. She was supposed to explain the reasons why her partner, a girl from Shanghai, chose to study in Canada other than the United States or elsewhere. The girl's family and educational background and her future study plans were intended to be supporting details. However, in her writing, Min started by introducing her partner's hometown—the city, the population and so on. Then, she shifted to her partner's undecided future plans as to whether to pursue a PhD after graduation or to return to her home country. Following this, she inserted the family background of her partner before she finally touched upon the reasons for her decision to study in Canada. Her “bush-clearing” (Shen, 1989, p.462) pattern of approaching the key point appeared very confusing to her teacher and classmates. On the other hand, the teacher's feedback upset Min too. She didn't understand how she could jump right into the topic without a step-by-step lead-up to it.

In addition, much of the difficulty was caused by the shift from her previous memory-based education to the present research-based education. Her education in China, be it at the primary, secondary or undergraduate level, mainly involved appreciating sample texts, memorizing facts and imitating authorities. Little room was allowed for doubt and questioning. Students were seldom encouraged to touch upon original research of their own. A typical case in point was English language teaching. Based on this prior assumption of learning, she understood her first analytical essay for Film Studies as short answer questions. She was surprised when she was told she had to do research and formulate her own thesis statement and arguments. One of her early journals for the ESL writing course was intended to be a proposal to Bill Gates, the CEO of Microsoft. After listing several advantages of replacing the silicon-based computer

with the DNA computer in a short paragraph, she finished the writing abruptly, without a feasibility report or any further development of the ideas. It was evident that the focus on internalization of knowledge in her previous educational system (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999) largely accounted for her inefficiency in completing tasks in an educational system in which originality and independent research are emphasized.

However, in cases where culturally convergent rhetorical styles were involved, she was able to produce excellent texts. She skillfully utilized rhetorical devices such as personification and metaphor in one of her descriptive writings, which earned her a good mark. Several of her journals narrating some events were also favorably commented on. In these writings, I observed some familiar Chinese constructions, but they were positively accepted for the reason that these structures were available in English too. Besides, her good command of English also enabled her to express herself in an efficient way. Her being placed in a higher level ESL program was an indication of her proficient English. However, this did not mean that she had no problem with the language. She had difficult moments dealing with the formalities of words and structures. On several occasions, it was suggested that she use more formal expressions. She found that the English she had learned before was not exactly the English she was supposed to use. It seemed a more difficult but urgent task for her to set up a vocabulary bank of formal, abstract and specialized “code words” (Casanave, 1992, p.160). While her first language writing strategies contributed to her English writing in a general way, the “switches” back to her first language (Friedlander, 1990, p.113) did not help when subject-specific tasks were involved.

3.1.2 Micro-process: confusion and transition of identity

Examining these products as they were being created drew my interest to the micro-process of her writing. Since I was working with her on a regular basis, I was party to her statements about the struggles she was undergoing to create these products. I began to learn something about her process of composing as she was doing it.

In dealing with a specific assignment, Min found it hard to locate her identity as a learner-writer in this Canadian university setting. Coming from a culture in which individual voice is usually drowned in the sea of collective voice, she felt hesitant to write her own opinions. She was not sure what she was supposed to say in a critique of an article. “I don’t know what is the problem with it. I think it is excellent. How can I criticize it when I don’t see the problems?” Her native culture’s emphasis on appreciating and respecting authorities prevented her from thinking critically as expected by a Western teacher. Assuming that “critical” means “to criticize”, she stated that she was not accustomed to “picking faults of those famous people”. Standing between two cultures, she was struggling to combine the knowledge she had learned in both languages with the writing conventions she recently learned in Canada. She often reminded herself to “be critical”, in order to establish an appropriate writer identity that was responsible for the reader—her professor and teacher, as well as the socio-cultural context that supports this discourse. All her effort, however, was trying to fit herself into the role of what Ivanic (1994) calls a “puppet” strung along by the values and practices of the social context (p.11). It was not an identity that she felt truly portrayed herself (Shen, 1989; p.461), but

a self that satisfied a specific group of readers who were significant to her academic success.

3.1.3 Macro-process: evolution of identity

There were several positive aspects that enabled her eventually to progress in composing skills and alter her identity in writing to suit Western academic standards. First of all, her serious attitude toward every micro-process element practiced in class allowed her to grasp the writing skills quickly. She started to see the purpose and significance of strategies such as log writing, critiquing and peer revision as necessary training toward the mastery of overall competence in writing.

Secondly, she was able to make analogies to facilitate her learning (Johns, 1992). She was able to apply what she had learned through my explicit instruction to understanding the requirements and the teachers' intentions for each assignment. The new insights she gained about the distinctions and similarities between Eastern and Western education, the conventions of English writing, and notions such as criticism and individualism in Western culture through my diagnostic explanation, through the teachers' implicit or explicit instruction, as well as through her own practice and observation, helped her to clear up the confusion.

Her strong personality was another factor that allowed her to make progress. She did not give up easily in the face of difficulty. Though sometimes she really felt like crying, especially within the first month of arrival to Canada, she never did that. "I have never got such bad marks; but what's the use of crying?" So she determined that she must seek some help in order to catch up. She was hardworking too, doing her best for each

single assignment. Even when I gave her extra tasks such as revising some of the poorly scored writing based on my suggestions, she did it and brought in for further feedback. Her perseverance could be felt all through the period that we were working together. Her case was a perfect example of how individual characteristics make a difference on the way to success.

The lessons she had learned from those hard experiences in the first couple of months were substantial. She realized that to achieve success in this Canadian university, it is far from enough to know only grammar and vocabulary of the English language. What had caused her extreme frustration was her ignorance of the Western educational conventions and different genres of academic writing. The change of beliefs in learning was the prerequisite for progress, and for creating a proper identity in writing at this Western higher learning institution.

Her improvement was evident in terms of the composing process, the written texts, and the learning process in which independence is a crucial point. Her later assignments were seldom criticized for organizational defects. In the composing process, her good command of language skills at the level of general lexicon and syntax, as well as the newly acquired strategies to structure writing and organise ideas all allowed her to deal with issues other than grammar and to present an effective identity in writing. One of her later journals on time management was clearly structured. It started with the thesis statement, followed by supporting paragraphs indicating first, second and third arguments, each well developed. For this piece of writing, she got full marks for all three evaluation criteria--logic, comprehension and response. She was also learning to do research by making use of the library, web sites and other sources. She was gradually navigating

herself in the desired direction in this Western academic world. The identity of an independent, critical writer evolved out of her second language learning experience which went beyond the influence of her first culture.

3.2 Results of Case B

In this study, the relationship between micro-process and macro-process is closely aligned. In an instructional setting, the macro-process consists of many micro-process elements and experiences organized in a particular way. Since the beliefs of the teacher were very explicitly articulated, I will list some of them to compare and contrast the beliefs articulated by the students either explicitly or implicitly. What I need to clarify here is that some of the micro-process activities were talked about by the teacher and the students in relation to the macro-process. The two processes were often mixed up and integrated in their discourse.

The teacher's comments were often about the macro-process since she was the teacher, the one who monitored and organized the learning process (the macro-process). But implicit in her comments and in her organization of the course were beliefs about the micro-process, that a piece of writing is improved by using certain strategies used by good writers. Being a teacher allowed her to see the micro-process activities in terms of the macro-process of learning. For example, the teacher clearly believed that students do peer feedback not just to learn to write, but also to produce a better product this time. The immediate purpose was to produce a better product, which is the micro-process; but the teacher also saw the ultimate purpose of doing it as improving writing skills, which is the macro-process.

3.2.1 Beliefs in the micro-process

The teacher's beliefs

Free writing is a key practice in process writing classes. Jane asserted that **free writing** was not only important for ESL writers, but for experienced writers too. In other words, she believed that it is an effective component in the composing process. Free writing is not simply an ESL practice; it comes from first language writing research. Students loved free writing especially when the teacher responded to it. This point was well endorsed by the students, as will be seen later in this section. The view was also consistent with Woods' (1984) finding that among the different aspects of the writing process, free writing was one of the strategies that was easy to grasp and to integrate by most students though the notion was new to them (p.130).

Jane had strong beliefs with regard to the focus of the composing process. To her, **language** was the last issue. **Error correction** should be done at a later stage of the process. "I don't believe in error correction," she said. Though she occasionally included a grammar exercise in class, she did not correct grammar errors in students' writing until the final draft, which reflected her beliefs in the composing process.

I believe in that you can know rules, but you cannot use it. There are earlier acquisitions and later acquisitions. Language just happens. If you have enough input, and opportunities for output, you don't need explicit grammar instruction.

This belief is also related to her notion of language acquisition. She corrected errors such as articles and prepositions which are "later acquisitions", but she did not expect students

to be able to fix those. Her goal of teaching was to try to make students understand how to structure a formal essay, so that it was recognizable and acceptable to a native speaker. In her opinion, students' major problems were in content and organization. It was the wrong time to mention verb tenses and prepositions at an early stage; it would take away students' attention. Besides, there were some tough structures that nobody ever touched; a teacher could not teach all the rules in English. Therefore, students "get to acquire them when they read and listen to enough language." To Jane, it was obvious that adequate input of live language was more important than error correction.

Jane considered **multiple draft revision** very important in the composing process because "that's what the professional writers do." Her underlying assumption was that what has proved to be effective strategies for successful writers must work for student writers as well. Students have to learn revising as a part of the micro-process in order to improve the macro-process. Jane also valued the effect of **peer evaluation** because peers were not biased and therefore able to offer more objective feedback, which would eventually help with the quality of the product.

Students' Beliefs

The responses of the students to the same issues listed above exhibited similarity within the group although they were interviewed separately. However, some of the beliefs they expressed were identical to those of the teacher and some were not, which revealed some matches and mismatches between the teacher and the students. The teacher was thinking macro-process in assigning a certain writing activity, while the

students, however, were thinking of only the micro-process, some discrete, unrelated elements in the composing process.

The four students had very positive comments on **free writing**. Free writing was easy to start and it provided them with plenty of chances to exercise what they had learned. To Julia, it had another advantage: “You just have time to write down what you think; you don’t have time to translate [from first language to second language].” Interestingly enough, students’ focus on free writing was purely related to the immediate process, the micro, not the macro.

The students all considered **revision** a helpful practice, which made them aware of their weaknesses in writing. But Glen and Betty were hesitant about the effect of **multiple drafts**. They didn’t think it made a significant difference if more than three revisions took place. They didn’t realize that this practice would ultimately help them to improve in the big picture. They did not have the same understanding of the relationship of the micro-process and macro-process as the teacher did.

However, when it came to **error correction**, Julia expressed a strong preference that the teacher correct her mistakes immediately so that she would be able to identify them and be able to improve. Glen and Betty also wished that the teacher would point out most of their mistakes. This was very different from Jane’s belief in error correction. This reality also reflected the “complex process” of error treatment in which learners’ expectations and the extent to which the teacher should provide negative feedback are all factors to be considered (Ellis, 1994; p.585).

Another disparity between the beliefs of the teacher and the students was that of self-evaluation and **peer evaluation**. While Jane believed that students learned from their

own mistakes and from their peers, students viewed self-evaluation as “useless”, claiming that “I can’t see my own weakness”, “it’s difficult to change my style and my idea”, and “it’s embarrassing to mark my own paper.” They were also doubtful about the effect of peer evaluation. The reason lay in their perception of authority in learning and their sense of responsibility for their classmates. On the one hand, they felt that they were not in a good position to offer suggestions. On the other hand, they didn’t trust their peers’ opinion: “I don’t take suggestions of my classmates; but if the suggestions are given from Jane, I’ll pay attention.” In addition, they wished to be responsible for their classmates, “I’m afraid I may give the wrong suggestion”. This was also an indication of their diffidence about their English proficiency. However, students failed to understand that the teacher’s intention was to train them to be better writers through these activities.

In general, the students claimed that they had not learned much from their classmates through peer evaluation or peer review. Julia offered an example to illustrate her idea. Jane once changed the term “paper factory” into “paper mill” in her writing because the latter was the native speaker expression. “Only Jane can give us this kind of suggestion.” This statement of Julia reflected her belief in native speaker English.

In addition to the above comparable points between the teacher and the students concerning writing strategies employed in the micro-process, these students also shared something that was not mentioned by the teacher, which indicated the **interference of first language** in the second language writing process. In some cases, they all had to think in their native language when they composed; their writing was influenced by their first language writing skills. According to Robert, “Chinese writing way and English writing way are different”. In addition, his Chinese writing was not very good, plus it was

“long time no write” in Chinese; therefore, it was very difficult for him to write in English. Betty said that she used “Chinese thinking” when she wrote in English, and it became a problem when the writing involved an argument. Glen made a great effort to think in English instead of translating his thoughts from Korean into English, but it took him time to do so. Glen and Julia assumed that first language interference was most evident at the sentence level. They had noticed some differences in sentence structures between English and their native languages. It seemed that these participants were all aware of the influence of their first language, and maybe the thought patterns and rhetorical styles in their native culture, though not at a conscious, theoretical level.

3.2.2 Beliefs in the macro-process

The teacher's beliefs

The teacher also had strong beliefs in aspects of the macro-process of learning to write in English. Jane claimed that she was sensitive to **cultural differences** and cultural backgrounds because much of her teaching included cultural information though some cultural instances were implied and not obvious. In writing, it was especially necessary to point out the differences in structure and rhetorical style. For example, “Japanese is very subtle”, but “directness is the big thing” in North American writing, so difficulties caused by this gap were inevitable. Jane also mentioned that, “in North America, we don’t take general statements without specific support. This is the real difference from other cultures where you can write beautifully, and use complicated vocabulary. ... [T]he professors in Canada just cannot be impressed because they want specific support.” This reflected her understanding of the connection of product to the macro-process.

Another belief that Jane often articulated was the interplay of **reading and writing** abilities, which is not directly linked to the micro-process. “If they [students] read very little, how can you expect them to have the kind of vocabulary? ... You try to get them to read because reading is effective to improve their grammar and pick up the vocabulary.” She suggested that students read books or magazines that they were interested in, in order to expand grammar and vocabulary most efficiently.

Jane also stressed **learner independence**--“You have to foster independence in the learners because the whole culture is based on independence.” Some of the classroom activities she arranged reflected her beliefs in this regard. For example, she asked students to analyze the introduction and conclusion of an article and discuss them. She taught students how to use CD-ROM for information and took students to a computer lab to show them how to do a web-search because “hands-on practice is more effective than class instruction”. This was the practical part of her belief in learner independence. She was also against the idea of assigning a textbook for students to read because “textbooks are already too out-of-date by the time they are published”. Besides, Jane thought that learning in North America involved much more than just memorizing. Students had to understand the concept, and be able to summarize and analyze. As a result, instead of pushing students to read certain articles or books they may not be interested in, she advised students to read for pleasure, “to read what your passion is about.” In this way, learning was active and independent, and learners were responsible for their own learning. She also stated that teachers should not “meet the [ESL] students half way by giving them things to memorize and telling them what to read”. Teachers could give students cultural information, but students might not be able to absorb it. “They have to

experience it.” In other words, first-hand experience and individual endeavor are more important in shaping independent personality of students.

Jane considered her role as a writing instructor who gave **feedback** to the students as they moved toward the final product. However, she said, “The final product itself is not so important for me.” To her, the **process** of revising and improving was more important than the product. The focus on the process of writing is “focussing on the writer doing the work as it is going on rather than on the work itself after it is over” (Woods, 1984, p.101). It “concentrates on the problems or difficulties that the writer goes through and the blocks that the writer arrives at” (p.102). Jane’s focus on the process was always directed by her sense of improving students’ writing skills in the long run. Every activity in the micro-process and every complete micro-process itself were seen as one of the interlocking circles in the chain of macro-process.

In addition, Jane talked about some micro-process activities in terms of her beliefs about the macro-process which focuses on developing writing skills. For example, Jane believed in the value of **revision** in learning to write-- “It is through revision that you really learn about writing.” Multiple draft revising based on the feedback of the teacher and classmates was a key practice in Jane’s writing class. Jane thought it was the only way to improve writing skills. “Critiquing makes you more analytical. When critiquing is done in a positive way, they [students] become more analytical about their own writing.” It was through this practice, Jane said, students learned to look for support, to write a strong thesis, to improve their introductions and conclusions.

Jane’s belief underlying the practice of **peer evaluation** was also firm. She said, “Learning from peers is more important than learning from the teacher.” The reason was

that students were able to see the strengths and weaknesses of peers, and therefore, may benefit more by learning from peers who were at almost the same level as them. Jane was aware that not everybody in the class had developed strong critical skills; some of them were not ready yet; so Jane expected them to learn from their peers and become more critical. Besides, she thought that students could be more objective and critical when they evaluated another person's writing. Eventually it was hoped that they would be able to apply the knowledge they obtained through this practice to their own writing.

Students' beliefs

The four students had less to comment on the teaching method and classroom activities in general in the first interview. This might be a result of their limited life experience and moderate language proficiency. It could also be due to their uneasiness about giving opinions on situations over which they felt powerless and a lack of control (Nunan, 1989). However, their perceptions of some of the classroom do's and don'ts were amazingly identical. In cases such as when the teacher spoke quickly or when they did not understand the teacher in class, they all tended to keep silent. Though Julia, Robert and Glen were more active and asked for clarification, they felt hesitant to ask a second time if they still did not get a good sense of the teacher's explanation. Glen attributed this to cultural influence: "I think it's **the culture of Asia**", in which students are not encouraged to "bother the teacher" in class. He assumed that "If I ask again and again, she'll [get] annoyed". Therefore, "I just pretend to understand" in order to save face in front of peers and save trouble for the teacher, yet at the cost of learning less for himself. Julia preferred to ask questions after class for the consideration of keeping the

pace of classroom activities smooth. She claimed, "I keep this habit from China". For Betty, it was more convenient to fall back on classmates. She was a self-conscious girl, and felt especially uncomfortable to raise questions or speak in class.

Jane's emphasis on the interaction of the four language skills, especially **reading and writing** echoed popularly among students. They all agreed that extensive reading enabled them to enlarge their vocabulary and use more complicated and varied structures. Glen tried to imitate the sentences he had read in newspapers; Betty learned a lot by reading novels. This was their focus on macro-process; but most interestingly, it was not related to Jane's view of effective micro-process improving macro-process.

In terms of the notion of **learner independence**, students' response demonstrated contradiction. On the one hand, they were enthusiastic about the computer lab research, which was intended to implant the sense of independent research in students. This activity was welcomed by the students who considered it not only helpful to the present writing, but also useful to their future study which might involve a lot of research on their own. On the other hand, the students all wished the teacher to be strict with them, push them gently, and give them moderate pressure from time to time so that they were more disciplined in learning. It seemed to them that learning was still not an active individual endeavor but was rather dependent on how and what the teacher taught.

The students hardly mentioned **revision** or **peer feedback** in terms of the macro-process. To them, these were only discrete activities in the writing class to help improve the **product** of their writing, even at this point, they were somewhat doubtful about the effects of these strategies. They failed to see the teacher's underlying assumption that the ultimate purpose of doing these was to make them better writers in the macro-process.

In addition to the above agreements and disagreements with the teacher, these students were also unanimous on one point. They did not have any expectations about this course when they entered this ESL program, and they remained ignorant of what they wanted to achieve when they were out of it. Maybe they had ideas, but they were not able to articulate them in a conscious way. This can be encoded in the **Asian culture** in which learning should be effortful but can be purposeless. When learning is for self-enrichment (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Lee, 2000; White, 1988), whatever is taught by the teacher is considered good. The participants' attitude formed a sharp contrast to some first year Canadian students that I tutored, who were able to write down their short-term and long-term goals easily and explicitly at our first meeting.

In summarizing both processes, it is evident that the teacher's beliefs of the relationship of micro and macro processes was that the micro-process elements of good writers provided a valid basis for organizational units and activities to practice in an instructional setting, that is, in the macro-process. She believed implicitly in certain strategies in the micro-process because she assigned activities in class and indicated in various ways that peer feedback and multi-drafting and so on were all important aspects of the composing process. However, all of her comments were about the macro-process, that is, if students practiced these strategies in the micro-process, they would ultimately improve their skills in the macro-process. In contrast to this, the students comments basically focused on the micro-process, based on whether they could do the activity they were doing, not on whether or not they could better their skills by practicing it. For

example, they failed to realize that even though they could not give correct feedback now, if they learned how to do it, they were going to be much better writers.

Another point I need to mention is that, although I did not intend to examine the issue of identity in the processes of ESL writing, it surfaced on its own. In this case, it was not just the identity as a writer. The beliefs the students articulated were concerned with the identity of the learner writer or learner identity. The students saw themselves as learners from different cultures; their learner identity was influenced by their Asian culture. Although I am not going to discuss this issue further, it is important to notice that when people learn to write, the concerns are not only what identities they try to create as writers, but also identities they have as learners, which also go beyond culture. In a sense, learner identity is also beyond cultural identity, which, together with writer identity and cultural identity, make the concept of identity even more complex.

4. Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined two studies on ESL writing with different focuses. In Case A, I mainly looked at the cultural influence on the evolution and construction of second language writer identity. In Case B, I focused more on beliefs about the processes of ESL writing: the beliefs of the teacher and the students, how their beliefs have evolved out of their previous experiences and have influenced students' writing. Although I separated the two cases for analysis and to develop insights, ultimately they were interconnected. In both cases, I tried to interpret the data by integrating issues of culture, identity and beliefs in ESL writing: their interconnections, how they influence and shape

each other, the results of their interplay with regard to the identity and beliefs in ESL writing.

In Case A, the participant's struggles and confusions in second language writing and the evolving process of her identity in writing were discussed in relation to the disjunction of the two cultural and educational systems. It was evident that culture played an important role in shaping and reshaping the identities of this writer. In Case B, the matches and mismatches in beliefs between the teacher and the students were found all through the micro and macro processes of ESL writing. These matches and mismatches, however, are not as simple as they appear. Underneath the surface, there are deep-rooted cultural assumptions accounting for this. This will be further elaborated in the next chapter, in which the research questions will be discussed in light of the literature and the two studies, and the concepts of culture, identity and beliefs will be brought together to examine their interwoven nature.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

1. Introduction

The two case studies in Chapter 4 were developed in light of the two research questions raised in the first chapter. Literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 provide theoretical relevance for the analysis of data and for discussions of the two research questions. The questions are:

1. What is the interplay of culture, writer identity and learner beliefs in the product and processes of ESL writing?
2. What are the signs of evolution of ESL learner beliefs, and how does the evolution of learner beliefs influence the product and processes of writing?

As I noted in Chapter 4, I studied two closely related cases; one growing out of the insights of the other. When I put the data together and did a comparative analyses (Maykut, Pamela & Morehouse, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I identified some recurring themes which correspond with the research questions I posed. In the remainder of this chapter, I am going to elaborate these themes in relation to the research questions.

2. Discussion and implications

2.1 Culture, identity and beliefs in the product and processes of ESL writing

In earlier discussions, I distinguished the notions of product and processes for the purpose of analysis in order to find out the mismatches imbedded in them between the beliefs of the teacher and the learners, and to clarify the transfer from focusing on the micro-process to focusing on the macro-process. However, the data show the interwoven

nature of these three perspectives, which ultimately provide three aspects of the same thing. Now I am going to put them together as an integral part to examine how they interplay and influence each other. My argument is that what are reflected in the product are the beliefs about the micro and macro processes. On the other hand, the beliefs about the micro and macro processes influence the quality of the product.

2.1.1 Cultural influence on writer identity and learner beliefs

One of the major themes that grew out of both cases indicated that first culture has a profound and pervasive influence on the construction of writer identity and the formation of learner beliefs in an ESL setting. Poole (1992) suggested that “second language contexts include cultural dimensions that powerfully and necessarily affect both the teaching and learning processes. ... [T]hese cultural aspects of setting and interaction do not represent peripheral details but are the primary vehicles through which message content is conveyed” (p.610). In Case A, the cultural factors were evident in Min’s writing at the earlier stage. Her frustrations were mostly caused by the distance of the prevailing ideologies in her first culture and those in this new target culture. Her improper rhetorical style, her misunderstanding of critical reasoning, and her ignorance of independent research were all instances of the effects of such distance. Though she later made a great effort to re-shape a writer identity that would go beyond the influence of her first culture, she had to be aware that her native culture was something inherent to her. She had to be very cautious all the time in order to keep a balanced self-representation that was above both her native culture and the target culture in her writing. When we look at Min, we can see that the cultural influence on the product has an

underlying basis in terms of what was going on in the processes. Because of this realization, I focused on the processes in Case B.

In Case B, culture was also a notion mentioned by the teacher and the students frequently. Both parties claimed awareness of cultural influence on second language learning. Jane paid attention to cultural factors in the classroom as a result of her recognition of “the inextricable bond between language and culture” (Wajnryb, 1992; p.40). As an ESL teacher, it is important for her to be aware that when students learn a language, they are also learning (about) the culture that language represents; and that students are cultural beings with cultural perspectives on the world, including culture-specific expectations of the classroom and learning processes (Deng & Liu, 1989; Wajnryb, 1992). On the part of the students, their awareness of first language and cultural influence on second language writing derived from their English learning experience. Though this awareness still stayed at the surface level, it was critical to them because they may be able to compare the two systems in a more conscious way and learn to appreciate the strengths of both instead of dreading the disparities between them. A harmonious learning environment can only be created when the teacher considers and respects the cultural dimensions of the students, and students in turn gain a positive attitude towards the culture of the target language.

Ilieva (2001) argued that “culture should be approached in a language classroom so as to facilitate learners’ gaining awareness of humans as inherently cultural beings and ‘positioned subjects’ ” (p.2). This awareness, however, should also accommodate an understanding of not only the students’ role, but also the teacher’s role as “culturally constrained and motivated” (Poole, 1992; p.611). The teacher as the principal agent

(Wajnryb, 1992) is a very important cultural being in the classroom. The teacher's cultural bearing derives from her or his life and work experiences. In the case of Jane, though she learned Danish in a second/third language setting, she "missed the struggle part" of the language learning because people in Denmark speak English too. This was different from the frustrations most students in her class have experienced, none of whose language was popularly spoken in this country. Besides, since she believed that "personality is stronger than culture", she sometimes tended to value it less than the students who emphasized the cultural homogeneity much more. Jane's beliefs have evolved from her language learning and teaching experiences, and she was, like the learners, positioned by the cultural values and educational philosophies that she has been molded into. Therefore, understanding what the teacher's beliefs are, how they are evolved and how they may influence students' learning are of vital importance to understanding the ESL classroom negotiation.

One of the important issues embedded in the notion of culture are the perceptions and beliefs related to the roles of teacher and students in the macro-process. In Case A, Min stated that her ESL teacher did not provide her with explicit information about the styles of writing and did not assign her a sample text to imitate, which are commonly part of the teacher's role in the culture of Chinese classrooms. As a Chinese tutor, I found it natural to provide explicit information about contrastive rhetorical styles that I felt allowed her to come to the realization of the cultural disparities in writing. It seemed to me that explicit knowledge of the different cultural conventions made it possible for her to bridge the two cultures in a way that she could deal with the conflicts in the styles.

In Case B, the students held two contradictory views of the role of the teacher simultaneously. On the one hand, they stated that the teacher should provide correct models, corrective feedback, and a strict learning environment in which students have no choice but to do the assigned topics and to follow the teacher's instructions. On the other hand, they all noted their appreciation for the "freedom" that they felt in the writing class, where the teacher's role was to act as a catalyst for creative ideas and be accommodating to imperfect language. This contradiction, as has been discussed in chapter 3, derived from the clash of cultural and educational backgrounds between the teacher and the students.

From the teacher's perspective, Jane viewed students as independent learners, often emphasizing *readiness* in the students for accepting new concepts and trying new things. She was careful with giving feedback because "not all the students are ready for the feedback". She tried not to over-inform them about their writing because it could confuse them. She would not push students to read or write unless they were readers or writers already. For her, it was a waste of time to point out students' mistakes "until the students' brain is ready to acquire that rule... until they are seeing it for themselves." However, students did not seem to understand Jane's notion of readiness. To them, a moderate push from the teacher could make them more disciplined and learn better. Though they all acknowledged improvement in writing by independent reading based on their interests, they still desired to be externally motivated through the effort of the teacher.

2.1.2. Culture, identity and beliefs in the product and processes of ESL writing

To date, research has not focused on the exploration of identity and beliefs in relation to the micro and macro processes of ESL writing. This research, however, attempted to integrate the notions of culture, identity and beliefs in the processes of ESL writing and examine how they interweave, interact and eventually contribute to the construction of learner identity and learner beliefs in an ESL writing class.

The awareness of the relationship between the micro and macro processes of writing is sometimes implicit in Case A. The link between them in relation to the construction of writer identity can also be at a subconscious level. When Min first came to me for help in the Writing Tutorial Service, her immediate purpose was to complete a certain assignment which represented a focus on the micro-process. However, during our meeting, both of us realized that what she needed most was some macro-process knowledge such as the cultural elements in learning and changing of beliefs and identities in terms of academic writing in the Western world. She had a macro-process orientation underlying her effort of getting help for a micro-process activity. Her case was different from the students in Case B. In fact, change in beliefs is a part of the macro-process because in order to change the way we write, we need to change our beliefs first, as well as the identities we attempt to develop.

The relationship between the micro-process and macro-process was an evident theme in Case B. The data suggested that there were matches and mismatches between the teacher and the students in terms of their beliefs about both the macro-process and the micro-process. In fact, the superordinate mismatch between teacher and students relates to their beliefs about the *relationship* of micro to macro processes. Interestingly, the other

mismatches noted seem to be subordinate to this higher-level issue. The mismatches, in essence, at both levels are caused by different cultural assumptions. Although I have distinguished between these two processes in previous chapters, at this point in my discussion I want to bring them together, and to show the relationship between them. For example, doing peer review is a micro-process strategy, but the willingness or unwillingness to do it in the ESL classroom concerns beliefs about the macro-process. When I talk about issues like this, I will integrate the two processes in order to give a whole picture of the issue being discussed.

An emphasis on the micro-process writing strategies is a key element in the writing component of the ESL program at this university. Jane was a strong believer of this practice, which was far removed from the prevailing methods in most EFL settings where students have obtained their previous English education. As a result, students' views on specific aspects of process writing demonstrated complexity and contradiction. As shown in the data, students held very positive attitudes toward some aspects of the process, such as free writing, which is a basic skill in process writing that focuses more on content than on language itself. They were also much inspired by the teacher's feedback. For instance, Jane's students sometimes told her that they have never had teachers "comment on their *thinking*", because English teachers in their previous educational settings usually commented on the language, not much on thought and content. It can be concluded that, "the most frequently verbalized benefit" to process writing is that students have received attention on problems no one ever discussed with them before: "the problems they had *while* writing" (Woods, 1984, p.131).

However, due to the effect of the beliefs they have already formed from their prior experience, students did not readily accept all the strategies in process writing. They were particularly doubtful about peer evaluation/review. The reason lay in the fact that they were accustomed to the “traditional product-oriented writing” (Woods, 1984; p.102) process, in which students wrote by imitating sample texts, and the teacher made corrections. They were also concerned with the face issue: if they gave negative feedback, it might hurt peers’ face; if they failed to point out the problems, they might lose face. Besides, students always wished to have a perfect sample writing to imitate. They were used to paying much attention to language accuracy, and expected grammar correction from the teacher though they claimed that they agreed with the teacher on the focus on content rather than on grammar accuracy. Besides, they believed in the authority of the teacher, and did not trust opinions of peers who were at their own level. Further, because of their belief in authority and their lack of confidence in themselves, they were hesitant to offer their suggestions to peers, who in turn may not value their suggestions for the same reason. The disparity between the beliefs of the teacher and the students, and the contradiction between students’ stated beliefs and implicit expectations reflect the complex reality of the ESL setting.

A complicated situation also occurred in the macro-process through which students grasped basic assumptions and skills as a result of practice over time and through cultural awareness. There were instances indicating an optimistic side. First, the shared cultural awareness not only promoted understanding between the students and the teacher, as well as among the students, but also facilitated writing in the sense that culturally divergent norms pertaining to writing did not imply superiority or inferiority of

a certain culture. There are simply different writing traditions handed down as cultural heritages. A proper text in one culture might be improper in another context. Learning to write in a second language means adapting oneself to that second language culture, namely, when in Rome, write as Romans write. Second, the shared acknowledgement of the interplay of basic language skills may help students improve writing competence through multi-dimensional strategies of reading, listening and speaking. Students may benefit from the multiple sources of accumulation of vocabulary, rhetorical and genre knowledge. Third, the shared appreciation of independent learning will eventually turn the teacher-dependent, sample text directed learning into self-dependent, research directed writing practice. The influence of this respect will be substantial to students should they remain in a setting where good writing competence is the prerequisite of becoming successful. The agreement between the teacher and the students will be ultimately beneficial to students' endeavor to establish a successful writer identity.

However, the other side of the coin indicated the disagreements of the teacher and the students in terms of the deeper level relation of the micro and macro processes. As shown in earlier discussions in this section as well as in Chapter 4, every time the teacher talked about the micro-process strategies, she related them to the macro-process, to improving students' competence in writing through these specific practices. Her micro-process strategies were in fact macro-oriented; macro-process is the combination of many micro-processes. Each of the micro-process activities was thought of in light of future and past micro-processes, which constitute the macro-process. However, students saw each of these activities as discrete tasks that did not connect with each other. This difference in beliefs and interpretations seems to underlie many other disagreements

concerning the micro-process elements, and also make the macro-process situation very complicated.

2.2 Evolution of learner beliefs and reconstruction of writer identity

The notion of beliefs is an important one in the two studies. Beliefs reflected in the studies are not discrete but interconnected; they “are not stable entities within the individual, but situated in social contexts and formed through specific instances of social interaction and, as a result, are constantly evolving” (Woods, in press, p.200). In both Case A and B, students experienced a puzzling period at the turn of changing beliefs and identities in their second language writing. Unlike the teacher in Case B who had strong beliefs to guide her teaching, the students, though had formed beliefs about language learning through their previous educational experience, were in the process of altering their beliefs to fit into the new learning environment. They accepted free writing which was a new writing strategy to them. They were doing revisions; they were learning the structure of English argumentative writing such as thesis and support. They became aware of the importance of individual research ability; their keen interest in web-search was a sign of emerging learner independence. Therefore, “the formation and development of beliefs can be seen as a type of learning” (Woods, in press, p.200). However, at a mental level they were still “wandering” at the junction of their first culture and second culture, longing for pushes from external forces such as the teacher, the tests and others. Learning was, to them, not an independent individual endeavor. Their beliefs in learning, and writing in this particular class, were in the process of evolution. This process was

influenced by the teacher's beliefs first of all. It was also altered by the educational settings they have been a part of.

In the case of Min, she had gone through a similar process. The difference was that her process of reformulating new beliefs about academic work seemed shorter. She seemed to be already on the right track of reconstructing a proper ESL writer identity. This track was paved with two streams of instructions: one was the general instruction from her ESL class, the other was the diagnostic instruction from me as a complement to the classroom learning.

When students and teachers first meet in an ESL class, their perceptions and beliefs may not overlap too much. It is through negotiation and effort to understand each other that students start to change their ideas and become closer to the teachers' beliefs. It may take students varying lengths of time to understand the teachers' philosophy of teaching. Then, the question is to what extent should teachers articulate explicitly their beliefs to students. Give them a gentle push or just wait until they are "ready" to understand the teacher? Are teachers' beliefs still subject to adjustment with different components of students in their class? Should they also take into consideration the students' cultures and be more helpful?

There are also cases when there is not only evolution but also lack of evolution in students learning. For example, in Case B, the evolution of the learner beliefs was slow and not evident as that of Min in Case A. For these learners, they have not reached the level to think of constructing a successful writer identity yet. Their awareness of evolving beliefs and creating writer identity was at the primary unconscious stage. The question

posed here is how could teachers assist learners to complete this process. Is explicit instruction an effective way or there are better solutions?

Based on the research questions and the results of the studies, some more specific questions were raised. For the majority of ESL students from Asian countries who are unable to get extra help, how do they manage to negotiate with the teacher in the classroom, how do teachers articulate their beliefs in teaching, and how many of these beliefs are accepted by students? How different are the students' beliefs, and how do they complete the process of evolving beliefs? Are they able to make the same progress as Min did? If yes, how do they accomplish this? If not, what are the factors hindering their progress in the micro and macro-processes of writing? What kind of instructions do they need to speed up their progress? To what extent should teachers bend their philosophies in order to take into account more traditional beliefs? Further studies are needed to tackle these questions.

ESL writers, as members of some culture or society, have been enculturated in particularly specific ways with regard to language use, and have learned the discourse conventions of that culture or society. They bring various cultural experiences to their writing experiences, and may encode meaning in ways that are different from that of the target culture (Söter, 1988). Strevens (1987) advocated that language teachers assist learners to compare the different cultural presuppositions between the target culture and their own culture, in order to come to terms with "the essential diversity, yet equality, of human society" (p.179). Lu (1987) also suggested that teachers not teach students to "survive the whirlpool of crosscurrents by avoiding it". Instead, teachers were advised to

use the classroom to moderate the currents. “Moderate the currents, but teach them from the beginning to struggle” (p.447).

3. Conclusion

Cultural elements in ESL writing are an important field to explore. To date, a great number of studies have contributed to the research of cultural differences and cultural influences on the construction of writer identity and the evolution of learner beliefs in second language writing. However, most of them have focused on analysis of cultural information in the written texts. The processes through which such texts are created, which should be a more important issue, have been ignored. This research, aimed at bridging this gap, focused on the dynamic relationship among culture, writer identity and learner beliefs with regard to the micro-process and macro-process of ESL writing. The notions of culture, identity and beliefs are tightly interwoven. They interconnect and interplay, and work together to shape learner beliefs in terms of education, and of writing in particular; they also work together in the reconstruction of an ESL writer’s identity, incorporating multiple influences and multiple intentions. However, the evolution of beliefs required for an ESL writer to adapt to a new learning context and to construct a new writer identity in that context is without any doubt, a daunting task. Effective ways to “moderate the current” (Lu, 1987, p.447) may be the directions for further research.

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