

An analysis of adult ESL short-course students' identities as writers

Sanchia Slater

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Supervisors:

Professor Leketi Makalela

Dr Dominique Mwepu

Declaration

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2013.

I declare that this research is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree, part of degree or examination at this or any other university.

_____ day of _____ 2013
Sanchia Harland Slater

Abstract

The present study investigated how adult speakers of English as a second language in South Africa perceive and construct themselves as writers in English. Two 'writing autobiographies' provided insight into participants' perceptions of themselves as writers in English as well as the writing experiences that contributed to these beliefs. A thematic content analysis of the data revealed four thematic networks, each clustering around a global motif. Writing was seen to be a public presentation and representation of individual meaning and ability and although participants appeared to view themselves as not yet proficient in the skills necessary for effective writing, this was mitigated by a sense of resilience in the face of negative educational and feedback experiences together with the belief that personal effort was instrumental in strengthening writing skills and abilities. The theory of self-efficacy was found to be a powerful concept that accounted for many of the themes that emerged from the data. Further research into the self-efficacy beliefs of adult ESL writers is recommended.

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Dedication

To the students who participated in this study, who so generously and courageously shared
their writing experiences with me,

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

By comparison to speaking, writing is a more difficult productive skill to master because it actively has to be taught (Harmer, 2004). However, writing is an important part of what it is to be literate in a world that privileges texts (Gee, 1996; Harmer, 2004). As such, writing is integral to certain strata of work and is a key ability in education, both as something that is taught and as a skill essential to the assessment process (Harmer, 2004; Pajares, 2007).

If writing is difficult to master as a skill in itself, this difficulty is compounded when writing in English as a second or additional language.¹ Issues with grammar and vocabulary as well as stylistic differences as compared to the writer's first language can interfere significantly with the experience of – and success in – writing (Silva, 1993).

Many aspects of the second language writing phenomenon have been studied. Research has been done on different approaches to and influences on writing (for example, Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2007; Matsuda, 2003; Silva, 1990; Silva & Leki, 2004), the nature of second language writing (for example, Harklau, 2002; Matsuda et al., 2003; Silva, 1993), language and writing anxiety (for example, Cheng, 2002; Cheng, 2004; MacIntyre et al., 1997), the effect of feedback on writing performance (for example, Kasper, 1998), the role of talk in the writing classroom (for example, Shi, 1998; Weissberg, 1994), self-perception, self-efficacy and self-concept in writing (for example, Pajares, 2002; Pajares & Johnson, 2004; Pollington, Wilcox & Morrison, 2001; Zimmerman, 2000) and identity in writing (for example, García & Gaddes, 2012; Ivanič, 1994; Park, 2011; Pavlenko, 2001; Tang & John, 1999).

¹ The term English as a second language implies a monolingual speaker while the term English as an additional language implies a multilingual speaker. Most South Africans are multilingual, so the term English as an additional language would be more appropriate than English as a second language. However, English as a second language, ESL or L2 are the terms most commonly found in the literature that deals with this particular field of study. Although this implies monolingual first-language speakers – which is often the case as a great deal of the literature comes from countries in which English is spoken in addition to one other language – the issues discussed in the literature appear to have broad applicability to both English second language speakers and English additional language speakers.

Although this research has shed light on the process of writing a text as well as the elements of the text itself, including how and to what extent the author appears within the text, it would seem that fewer studies have explicitly sought to define, describe and explore the parameters of what an identity as a writer is, particularly in which participants are actively engaged in reflecting on the act of writing and themselves as writers, especially in a second language. Those studies that have been done (for example, Fernsten, 2008; Simpson, 2009; Starfield, 2002) focus on student identity as a writer of academic texts within a university setting. Others (for example, Bottomley, Henk & Melnick, 1998; Pollington et al., 2001) have focused on writing identity in primary school children.

The way in which identity is constructed as a writer of texts in various situations outside of (or in addition to) academia, including the experiences that second language writers bring with them into the writing process, is therefore important to explore, particularly within South Africa's dysfunctional educational context.

1.2 Rationale

As an English as Second Language (ESL) facilitator at a language school, I work in a unit that offers both corporate training and short public courses in English to speakers of other languages.

Towards the end of 2011, I co-facilitated a class of 30 students who were doing the first module of the third level. The course books for this module comprise a grammar manual and a writing textbook in the current-traditional mould (Silva, 1990), which guides students through the writing of five different types of paragraphs utilising a "formula" of a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence. During a class in approximately the third week of the 10-week course, I asked the students the question, "What is the first thing you do before you start writing?" This is the answer I received: "We panic."

The response surprised me – I was expecting an answer that summarised the first steps in the writing process. Judging by their responses, it appeared that the majority of the students in that class lacked confidence in their ability to write in English. As a result of that comment, I became sensitised to many students' perceptions in the various courses I

facilitated throughout the following months that they are somehow “lacking” as writers. This is despite the fact that much of their writing is, to me, interesting and well executed.

This experience raised questions regarding how students see themselves as writers. This self-perception as writer is likely to influence students’ attitudes towards writing and possibly their writing ability.

1.3 Aim

The aim of the study is to explore and evaluate how adults with English as a second or additional language perceive and construct themselves as writers in English.

1.4 Key Terms

Within this study, an important concept is that of identity. Reber (1995, p. 355) defines identity as “...a person’s essential, continuous self, the internal, subjective concept of oneself as an individual.” Thus, according to this definition, identity forms the core of a person and is something that is carried within one from moment to moment. A more general definition of identity is that of Ivanič (1994, p. 4) in which she notes that identity is an “...everyday word for people’s sense of who they are.”

These two definitions allude to one perspective on identity in which a person’s identity is internal and subjective. Another, different perspective on identity is that it is socially constructed, able to be challenged and changed, and a site of struggle. Identity is not a homogeneous construct and an individual does not have one single identity. Rather, each individual is made up of a multiplicity of identities (McKinney & Norton, 2008; Norton, 2008). This has implications not only for how people view themselves and for the choices they make but also for how they construct themselves and are constructed by their environments (Harklau, 2000). Considering the multidimensional nature of identity, three interrelated aspects of identity are pertinent to this study. The first dimension is self-efficacy, the second is self-concept and the third is self-perception.

1.4.1 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to the beliefs that an individual holds regarding his/her ability to complete tasks or a course of action (Bandura, 1977). In the case of writing identity, self-efficacy would refer to what an individual believes about his/her ability to write. Self-efficacy is a powerful predictor of writing performance (Pajares, 2003; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Zimmerman, 2000) as well as being a powerful mediator of academic performance more generally (Schunk, 1991). Not only are self-efficacy beliefs related to an individual's actual task performance, they are also related to an individual's cognition and affect, perseverance when confronted by obstacles and the amount of effort put into a task. Self-efficacy beliefs are malleable and can change in response to feedback from the environment, particularly in response to feedback given by a significant other (Pajares & Johnson, 1994).

1.4.2 Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to an individual's general idea and description of him/herself (Pajares, 2003) or, more specifically, what we see, feel and understand about what we can do, what we know, what we look like and how acceptable we are in the social world (Byrne, 1984, p. 429). Although distinct from self-efficacy, self-concept is one of its most closely related constructs (Zimmerman, 2000). The self-concept is theorised as being a hierarchical construct, with a fairly stable general self-concept at the top and various self-concepts arranged below it (Bong & Clark, 1999), one of which is an academic self-concept. Research shows that different self-concepts emerge under different conditions (see, for example, Onorato & Turner, 2004) which ties in with the notion of a fluid, socially constructed identity. The self-concept is linked to motivation and adapts in response to feedback from an individual's self-perception as well as feedback from significant others in the individual's environment (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Schunk, 1991).

1.4.3 Self-Perception

Self-perception refers to how an individual views him/herself. In the case of a writing identity, self-perception would refer to how an individual views him/herself in terms of writing in English or how and to what extent an individual views him/herself as a writer in English. As with the other two constructs described above, self-perception is sensitive to environmental influences, including observations and feedback from significant others (Schunk, 1991). In addition, perception as a general construct is linked to self-efficacy because one's perception of one's self-efficacy influences behaviour more strongly than one's actual ability (Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Self-perception is also related to self-concept, in that the way in which one views oneself will impact on one's description and evaluation of oneself.

All three dimensions are reflexive, in that they refer back to the self. Each dimension is also made up of other, interrelated dimensions such as self-confidence and self-esteem, so they are not unidimensional, homogeneous constructs.

Pajares and Johnson (1994, p. 326) comment that

‘We are, in very real fashion, what we believe. For this reason, our self can become fused with beliefs that form the core of who we are: Writers’ beliefs about their writing or athletes’ confidence about their abilities in their sport are, in essence, beliefs about their core, personal, “global” self.’

Considering the nature of identity, it is acknowledged that the writing identity is only one of a multiplicity of identities that participants have brought to the study as it is the specific identity that was activated by the questions in the research instrument.

1.5 Summary of Chapters

Chapter Two provides a review of literature pertinent to writing and identity, including approaches to writing, the situation and construction of identity within texts and the various ways in which identity as author is created.

Chapter Three deals with the procedure of the study, the method of analysis and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four provides a description and analysis of the findings of the study in terms of the apparent themes.

Chapter Five contains the conclusion to the study, including limitations and possibilities for further research in this area.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of the literature on writing and identity, including areas related to writing in a first and second language, various approaches to writing, identity in autobiography and identity as author in academic writing.

2.1 Writing in First and Second Language

Literature on writing tends to fall into two main groups, namely, research on issues in first language (L1) writing and research on issues in second language (L2) writing. It has been noted that some of the issues and findings in L1 writing research are applicable to L2 writing as well, but that there are additional challenges specific to L2 writing in English (Silva, 1990). L2 writing is also influenced by the disciplines of rhetoric, linguistics, composition studies and applied linguistics (Silva & Leki, 2004). Knowledge about L2 writing, as well as how students approach the writing of L2 texts, informs writing curricula, pedagogy and assessment.

2.2 Product, Process and Genre Approaches to Writing

Approaches to the act of writing, including its teaching and assessment, have been governed by three main focuses. The first is known as the “product” approach, the second as the “process” approach and the third as the “genre” approach. Far from being homogeneous, each approach is made up of a variety of schools of thought.

Broadly speaking, product writing focuses on the final written text while process writing focuses on the elements of the path to the final written text. Product writing thus concentrates on the type of text and the correctness of its structure, syntax, grammar and lexis. Controlled composition and current-traditional pedagogies would fall within this approach to writing (Silva, 1990).

Process writing concentrates on writing as a process of brainstorming, planning, drafting, editing and revising together with a focus on writing as a means of individual expression. The product is not unimportant; it is simply not the main focus of writing pedagogy or research.

Within the history of writing studies, between the 1960s and 1980s, process writing approaches grew out of a recognition of and reaction to the limits of the product approach (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996), although Matsuda (2003) has noted that attempts to utilise a process writing approach appeared much earlier than that. He further notes that, in terms of its discourse, the process approach has relied on a reification of the product approach so as to be able to position itself as a reform movement. The distinction between process and product writing and the generally accepted history of the progress of writing pedagogy may not be as clear cut as laid out in the generally accepted timeline of the two approaches (Matsuda, 2003).

The third approach to writing pedagogy is called the genre approach. While product approaches focus on the finished text and process approaches focus on the individual's voice and the recursive process of crafting a text, the genre approach acknowledges that written texts are socially situated and have a particular social purpose, which is expressed through their structural and linguistic organisation or the types of 'moves' that make up a text (Henry & Roseberry, 1998). Genre approaches therefore emphasise the social context in which the text is positioned and their communicative purpose as well as the audience to whom these texts are communicating and the way in which this communication takes place (Hyland, 2003; Hyland, 2007).

According to Johns et al. (2006), by deconstructing the different writing genres and making the requirements of different writing genres clear, teachers facilitate L2 students' access to, understanding of and ability to produce texts that carry cultural capital within the dominant discourses of society. Making this knowledge explicit allows L2 students not only to produce these texts but also provides a standpoint from which texts (and, by extension, the dominant discourses of society) can be critiqued. In such a way, L2 students are more empowered than they would be by the product and process approaches alone (Johns et al., 2006). Teaching can also become more effective as in the study by Henry and Roseberry

(1998) in which students who deconstructed an authentic text were more successful in constructing their own text in that genre than a group of students who were taught writing using more traditional approaches.

Although product, process and genre approaches are traditionally viewed as being in opposition to each other, Badger and White (2000) note that it is possible to combine all three approaches to successfully produce a text. Within their model of a process genre approach, writing a text would start with an analysis of the elements of an authentic model text as well as of the process by which the writer would have decided to include certain elements. The second step in the model would be to analyse the purpose of the text, followed by an analysis of the audience, the information that should be contained and the ways in which this information can be presented within the text. Once this analysis has taken place, the student then moves through a process of planning, drafting and publishing the text. At every stage, students can receive input from the teacher, other learners and other texts if necessary (Badger & White, 2000).

Within all of these approaches, writing in a second language poses challenges to the writer, some of which are detailed below.

2.3 Writing issues in L2

While L1 and L2 writing share generally similar characteristics in terms of the process of writing a text, there are some important differences between the two that have implications for L2 writing pedagogy (Silva, 1993). Silva's (1993) review of 72 studies done on L1 and L2 writing showed that although L1 and L2 composing processes were similar, L2 writers did less planning and had more difficulty generating ideas or organising material for the text to be written, which is problematic for a purely process approach to writing pedagogy.

Writing the text was more difficult, took longer and was a less fluent process due to issues with vocabulary. Although both L1 and L2 writers utilised similar revision strategies, L2 writers had more difficulty with this part of the writing process and placed more emphasis on grammar. In terms of the text produced, the writing was seen to be less fluent, received lower marks and contained more errors. Shorter and less precise words were used. L2

writing was also less complex. Structure and argument tended to be influenced by the first language of the subjects and based on what was the norm or acceptable in the subjects' home language as compared to English (Silva, 1993, pp. 661-668). All of these issues indicate that a genre approach to writing pedagogy may be useful as ESL students deconstruct and analyse authentic texts, which exposes them to the correct structure and appropriate and useful vocabulary.

One of Silva's (1993) conclusions is that it is important not to view L1 and L2 writing as the same, even if some elements do overlap, so L2 writing teachers and researchers need "...to develop theories that adequately explain the phenomenon of L2 writing" (p. 669). The research findings discussed in the survey also have implications for assessment, writing course development, the pedagogical background requirements of the teacher, the L2 writing classroom context and the written text itself. Considering the myriad of L2 writing issues highlighted in the research, the availability of one-on-one tutoring is important for L2 writing students as the classroom context cannot adequately cover all aspects of writing instruction needed for L2 writers (Harris & Silva, 1993).

There is a profound difference between being able to write in a first language as compared to a second language. According to Silva (1992), it is usually easier to write in one's first language due to familiarity with the language, acceptable discursal structures and the potential audience. This changes when writing in a second language. Of particular note is that writing in a second language is viewed as most difficult due to lack of vocabulary which limits the ability to express oneself accurately. This, and issues with grammar, have implications for the reviewing process. Less time is spent reviewing texts and refining them at the global level (that is, in terms of structure and organisation) and more at the local level (that is, in terms of grammar), which is different to the reviewing process employed in first language writing (Silva, 1992).

In Silva's (1992) study, participants had a number of suggestions as to how teachers could respond to the issues raised in the writing classroom and it was noted in the study that students bring a variety of perceptions about writing into the classroom with them, to which teachers should be sensitive so that their writing pedagogies can help create a supportive and encouraging environment.

In addition to suggestions for teachers in the writing classroom, student writers also have very clear ideas about what makes a piece of writing successful. For example, Silva and Nicholls (1993) found that ideas about successful writing incorporate personal goals, as well as various beliefs about writing. Student writers had goals and beliefs related to the poetic features of language in successful writing. Writing was seen as a way of enhancing subject knowledge and reasoning ability. In addition, writing success was seen to result from application of writing strategies in the composing process as well as, among other factors, hard work and attention to language and structure. Thus, student writers have a variety of perceptions regarding what makes writing successful and varying degrees of belief in these. This has implications for how they respond to instruction in the writing classroom, which has further repercussions for their identities, as will be discussed below.

2.4 L2 Writing and Identity

Elements of the writing classroom and the way in which a text is constructed are only two aspects of what contributes to successful writing. Students' perceptions of themselves and their abilities – in whatever discipline – are significantly positively correlated with their academic success (Zimmerman, 2000). A positive identity (both academically and generally) is linked to greater academic success while the reverse is also true. As it applies to writing, the beliefs one holds about one's writing abilities are linked to one's writing performance (Pajares, 2003) as well as being part of one's overall identity. Shifts in identity and the behaviour mediated by self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by feedback received from individuals' internal cognitive and affective states as well as by information from the broader environment, including persuasion from significant others within that environment (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1982). Self-efficacy is not the only construct that is influenced by feedback. Feedback from the environment also has a mediating effect on self-perception and self-concept and, therefore, on identity (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

This process of identity change in response to environmental feedback has been illustrated by Harklau (2000). The three high-school ESL students that participated in Harklau's longitudinal study were viewed by their teachers as hard-working, inspirational and determined (albeit with language deficits). This identity was reinforced by the way in which

the students portrayed themselves in their writing and in class, and the affirmation they received from their teachers for this.

In contrast, when these students went to college, their teachers viewed them in a different, and unfavourable, light. Although still in need of ESL classes, these students were not recent immigrants and so did not conform to the teachers' ideas and expectations of how immigrants should behave. Their identities were also a source of conflict because the curriculum was constructed with more recent immigrants in mind in terms of its themes of acculturation. The three students started to display resistance behaviours and by the end of the first semester, two students had dropped out of their English classes entirely. It is therefore clear that identities are in a constant process of shaping and being shaped by a variety of factors in one's environment and that the type of academic environment inhabited is very powerful in shaping students' self-perceptions, academic behaviours and choices (Harklau, 2000).

From a social constructionist perspective, an individual's identities are contextual and historical and are always situated within an interaction with the social environment (McKinney & Norton, 2008). Identity is inextricably intertwined with language (Norton, 1997; Peirce, 1995). People not only express themselves/their selves through language and use language to create these selves as well, they are also positioned by their choice of language, which is limited by the discourses available to them (Tang & John, 1999; Ivanič, 1994). Some of these discourses are also more privileged than others, which has an impact on the social identity of second language speakers (Gee, 1996; Norton, 1995). While a rich diversity of identities is available in the ESL context, these identities are often a site of struggle as ESL learners construct and re-construct themselves within a different language and often in a new and different environment (McKinney & Norton, 2008; Norton, 2008).

The fact that second language speakers continue to learn English despite the identity conflict that takes place can best be explained by Peirce's (1995, p. 17) concept of investment in learning and in English as a way of admitting themselves into society's privileged discourses and increasing their own cultural capital in the process. Allied to this is the idea of investment in a particular social identity valued in a particular context (Peirce, 1995). This has interesting implications for the South African context in which only 9.6

percent of the South African population speaks English as a first language and in only four of the nine provinces (StatsSA, 2012). Unlike the English first language contexts of the majority of studies carried out on English second language identity, South Africa's political history and demographic and language profile argue against English as lingua franca, at least at face value.

However, the four provinces in which English is spoken as a first language also house the majority of South Africa's most prestigious universities and a large number of South Africa's biggest companies. Investment in English in South Africa can thus be explained by its status as the language of business, education, information exchange and popular culture (Harmer, 2007, pp. 14-15) and, like the participants of the studies cited, South African speakers of English as a second language express a multiplicity of identities in a multiplicity of contexts, at least one of which is to be found in their written texts. The concept of textual identity will be discussed in more detail below.

2.4.1 Identity in Written Texts

Identity in writing can be implicitly created through the use of language and discourse in a written text (Ivanič, 1994) or it can be explicitly stated and constructed in autobiographical writing. As an implicit construct, identity can be discerned through analysing the linguistic features of a text, with the most common identity examined being that of the academic identity of ESL students at university. As explicitly stated constructs, identities lend themselves to analyses that take various contexts into account.

2.4.1.1 Discourse, Language and Identity

A writer's identity in a text is created by their discursal choices, one of which is the choice of first person pronouns used in writing (Tang & John, 1999). In their study of writer identities in undergraduate academic essays as evidenced in the frequency of appearance of the first person pronoun, Tang and John (1999) distinguished six discrete identities apparent

through the use of first person pronouns on a continuum from least powerful to most powerful.

Similarly, a number of different identities can be seen to be apparent in the discursive choices in discursive writing. In an analysis of identities in a discursive essay sample, Ivanič (1994, p. 7) talks about the student participant “writing herself into” the academic community while still maintaining ties to her identities as a black woman, a Black activist and a feminist. This would be an example of “textual identity” (p. 10), one of three or four identities constructed in and constructed by writing. The other identities include the performer/ animator (the doer), the author (self as originator of ideas) and possibly one termed the “current” or “addressing” self, which appears to be an identity expressed through another identity (Ivanič, 1994).

Through linguistic analysis, a number of implicit identities in text may therefore be revealed, even though writers may not be aware of the selves they are constructing through their choice of language and discourse. Being aware of and working with the identities can be of benefit to student writers, particularly as these identities relate to academic writing. Making students aware of the construction of an academic identity would be a similarly empowering process as deconstructing genres so that they may be reconstructed and could be instrumental in avoiding the plagiarism that can result as a consequence of not having appropriated an authentic academic voice. This is an aspect of identity in writing that will be explored further on in this chapter.

2.4.1.2 Identity in Autobiography

In addition to the identities constructed through discourse and language choices, identities are also constructed in autobiographical writing because autobiography as a genre allows for the explicit creation of an identity. As Ivanič (1994) also notes, giving students the opportunity to write about themselves and their lives is essential “...for if the writer is not engaged as a maker of meanings, as *author*, writing, and the learning and teaching of writing would be barren enterprises” (p. 12, emphasis in the original).

One such study looked at a culturally responsive after-school project in which Latina youth read various texts written by Latina authors and then wrote responses to what they had read. The study's authors (García & Gaddes, 2012, p. 150) noted that the girls appeared to be "'authoring' themselves through writing" during the processes of writing their thoughts down and articulating their identities in relation to the texts they had read. This allowed them to examine their current identities and allowed for an identity shift where desired.

In a South African context, autobiographical topics in the ESL classroom (or in distance education) assign value to students' lives, allowing students to affirm and reaffirm their cultural identities in writing. This is important in any context in which people's cultural and linguistic identities have been denigrated or relegated to a position of inferiority as can happen to minority groups in countries in which English is the first language and as has happened in South Africa (Dowling, 1996).

As both García and Gaddes (2012) and Wu (1994) found in their research on the reimagining of identities through autobiography, the process of writing autobiographies could also provide a space and opportunity for student participants to re-envision themselves and their futures, to see themselves differently and to re-write life scripts if they wished through a construction and reconstruction of identities (Park, 2011). In addition, from the students' perspectives, the Cultural and Linguistic Autobiographies in Park's project and the process of writing them was found to be beneficial, particularly in terms of their enjoyment of both the genre and the process of writing. It was noted that "...confidence in one's abilities to write is one of the most important psychological components in improving one's actual writing skills" (Park, 2011, p. 167), which links with the process of developing self-efficacy beliefs described by Bandura (1977).

In addition to cultural autobiographies, cross-cultural autobiographical texts can also allow writers to position and reposition themselves in terms of their identities (Pavlenko, 2001). This is particularly true of writers' linguistic identities and their position vis-à-vis the language in which they are writing. Pavlenko (2001) argues that simply by writing in their second language, L2 writers assert their right to their ownership of the language through their use of it and, by extension, the meanings they construct within it. The idea of language ownership is central to identity change and construction (Norton, 1997), particularly as

ownership of a language like English allows access to more privileged societal discourses and, by extension, identities through the agency of the language learner.

2.4.2 Identity / Self-perceptions as a Writer

In addition to the identity that may be constructed within an autobiographical text, there is construction of an identity as a writer of texts. Much of the research in the field of “identity as a writer” or “identity as an author”, that is, how individuals see themselves as writers, has been done within an academic setting to discern how students develop an academic voice as a writer in an academic setting. Research has also been done at primary school level to ascertain how primary school children perceive themselves as writers.

Within academia, students writing in English as a second language often lack confidence due to ratings by English first-language teachers that view students’ linguistic ability as deficient or lacking (Fernsten, 2008). In a thematic analysis of a student’s description of her identity as a writer, Fernsten (2008) utilised a theory of writer marginalisation due to writing conflict between competing discourses as a lens through which to view a text written in response to the question, *Who am I as a writer?*, in which the student writer held a dual identity of good/bad writer, simultaneously conforming to and rebelling against the discourse of academic writing.

Multiple identities were apparent in the text. The student participant in the study expressed an identity as a competent writer, a deficit identity and a dual identity of accepting academic writing requirements while resisting them at the same time. Also interesting is the influence of her teachers on her writing identities. One teacher allowed an expressivist, competent-writer identity to emerge in high school, which then conflicted with the demands of academic discourse required by lecturers at university.

The fact that two different identities emerged in response to two different situations in Fernsten’s (2008) study links to research conducted regarding the fluidity of self-concept by Onorato and Turner (2004) in which the researchers demonstrated that self-concept is context bound and that different self-concepts will emerge in different situations that trigger that particular description or view of the self.

Of interest in Fernsten's (2008) study is the conflict between the identities that Critical Discourse Analysis drew out and that in other reflective writing pieces, the student also commented on her feelings of powerlessness as a writer as a result of teacher criticism. The author notes that the student's "...frustration with academic discourse is its focus on what is 'broken' in her writing, not on what is interesting, creative, or intelligent" (Fernsten, 2008, p. 48).

If identity as a writer is a complex phenomenon in an environment in which English is the predominant language, identity within the South African context is arguably much more complex given the past and present political context. Identity in South African could be seen to be a constant negotiation between Western, African and South African identity constructs (cf. Atay & Ece, 2009) within which there is a further multitude of cultural and linguistic identities.

In the South African university context, two pertinent studies have been done on identity as writer. Starfield's (2002) study is an analysis of two first-year Sociology essays written by two students from different backgrounds. One essay was written by a white English-speaking student in his thirties and the other essay was written by a younger, black, English second language speaking student. Even though the English first-language speaking student did not cite any references in his essay, his use of language ensured the creation of an acceptable academic identity which the marker recognised and to which she responded accordingly. In contrast, the essay written by the English second-language student quoted passages and cited references sporadically but did not respond to the question the essay was asking. Through citing other people's work rather than developing a personal and authoritative academic writing identity, this student borrowed the words of others who have more academic authority. As such, he was penalised for plagiarism and ultimately received a failing mark for the essay. In accepting his failure, this student identified himself as a second-language English speaker. According to Thesen (1997), this is an institutional identity label that is indicative of historical disadvantage and which positions students in a category characterised by deficit.

Starfield (2002) frames her analysis in terms of access to language, knowledge and meanings that are already deemed legitimate by broader society and, specifically, academia. She

argues that those who have already been inducted into these legitimated arenas appear to be able to negotiate and exercise much more authority in their identity as writer and to position the reader accordingly. Those who do not have access to legitimate language, knowledge and meanings find it much more difficult to negotiate and exercise this authority and are forced to depend on the words of others, and are often sanctioned as a result. In other words, ownership of the language has not been able to be asserted (Norton, 1997).

Without a certain level of writing ability, including both linguistic knowledge and social understanding of texts, second language speakers often “patchwrite” or borrow from other, more authoritative writers as they develop and negotiate their own identities as academic writers (Ouellette, 2008, p. 257). However, there appears to be a clear process in the development of an academic writing identity of which appropriation of texts can be part, which then allows for the questioning of plagiarism as a practice situated within the boundaries of ethical versus unethical. Development of an identity as academic writer is a process. Abasi, Akbari and Graves (2006) also been found that more experienced writers are also more aware of privileged discourses they could use to construct acceptable identities while less experienced writers find it more difficult to construct an identity as author because they tend to borrow texts viewed as authoritative, which ultimately creates an identity, viewed from the outside, as plagiarist (Abasi et al., 2006).

Identity as a novice student-writer in academia is not the only identity that has been investigated at the higher education level. Using metaphors written by tutors working in a writing centre at a university, Simpson (2009) used a thematic analysis to tease out the writing identities of the tutors who, having been chosen as tutors, are perceived as being successful student writers in an academic context. Simpson (2009, p. 200) identified four themes framed as continua. The first theme is that of “writing as representation and as construction of meaning”, the second sees “the writer as reliant on implicit and explicit knowledge”, the third refers to “the writer as agentive and passive” and the fourth places “writing as an individual and as social act”.

In the study, writers were variously preoccupied with the surface features of writing as well as the process of writing as an act of discovery and learning, knowledge about writing conventions and the tension between an identity separate from that of the academic

identity required in student essays. Writers were also variously seen as agents of their own construction of knowledge as well as passively regarding writing as a display, which echoes Ivanič's (1994) conception of writer as performer. Writing is a private act situated in a broader social context and, as such, can be a site of the struggle to express the appropriate (academic) identity while still remaining true to other, competing identities (Simpson, 2009). This identity struggle recalls Fernsten's (2008) study in which academic writing was seen as a site of identity conflict, at odds with other, more familiar identities.

A component of writing identity is self-efficacy, which has been explored at primary school level. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's perception of and belief in their ability to carry out and complete different tasks or courses of action and was first proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977. In Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, an individual's perceptions of their ability to complete a task or pursue a course of action depend on information received from previous successes or failures (mastery experiences), seeing others successfully carry out a task without negative consequences (vicarious experience), the type and degree of emotional arousal experienced when carrying out a task (emotional arousal) and through suggestion (verbal/social persuasion) (Bandura, 1977). People will be less likely to engage in an activity that they perceive exceeds their capabilities but will persevere if their sense of self-efficacy is strong. In explaining behaviour, it is important to note that an individual's actual capabilities are less important than the perception of these abilities (Bandura, 1982).

Utilising the theory of self-efficacy, Bottomley, Henk and Melnick (1998) developed a Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS), which measures children's self-perception of themselves as writers utilising five different categories that influence self-efficacy perceptions, namely:

- General progress, which describes how the child feels about his/her writing progress from past to present in a very general sense;
- Specific progress, which describes the child's progress in specific aspects of writing such as organisation of texts and sentence use and construction;
- Observational comparison, which describes how the child sees their writing as compared to others' writing;
- Social feedback, which describes the responses by teachers and peers to the child's writing; and

- Psychological states, which describes how the child feels when writing (e.g. calm, comfortable, relaxed, good).

Scoring on the WSPS would provide an indication of how the child perceives themselves as a writer in each of these categories. Each category is not necessarily discrete – there can be an overlap. The scale has been normed for children, so its applicability to how adults perceive themselves as writers is limited.

The WSPS has been used by Pollington, Wilcox and Morrison (2001) to determine whether there were any differences in fourth- and fifth-grade children's perceptions of themselves as writers as a result of teaching writing through writing workshop methods compared to more traditional methods. No statistically significant differences were found in participants' self-perceptions between the two approaches. The authors conclude that the results of their study do not support the notion that writing workshops lead to higher levels of positive writer self-perception despite various viewpoints to the contrary. Of note, however, is the finding that an important factor in students' attitude to writing is the teacher.

This finding is echoed in a review of writing self-efficacy by Pajares (2003, p. 153) who notes that "...an important pedagogical implication to emerge from these findings is that teachers would do well to take seriously their share of responsibility in nurturing the self-beliefs of their pupils [sic], for it is clear that these self-beliefs can have beneficial or destructive influences." It also links to Fernsten's (2008) study in which the student participant was frustrated due to the focus by teachers on what was "broken" in her writing while a teacher who nurtured the student's ability to write in an expressivistic way in high school allowed an identity of a competent writer to emerge.

Therefore, knowing students' perceptions about themselves can allow positive perceptions to be confirmed and negative perceptions to be challenged. This can impact on students' self-esteem, self-confidence and, ultimately, the identity that is allowed to emerge within a supportive environment with teachers who are mindful of the students in the classroom with them. As Bandura (1977, 1982) notes, building self-efficacy in one area often impacts positively on other areas, both related and unrelated. Knowing how adult ESL speakers who have come back to an education environment to learn English construct their identities will be of great value to ESL teachers in the South African context. Considering the influence of

the significant other on an individual's self-perception, self-concept and self-efficacy beliefs, ESL teachers are uniquely placed to challenge negative identities and confirm positive identities. This opens up possibilities for transformation in the classroom and beyond.

In conclusion, this chapter has set out to provide a review of the pertinent research on writing and identity that this study seeks to add to and extend. In summary, most research has been done internationally, while virtually all the research has studied identity within an academic environment. The present study adds to this body of knowledge by scrutinising identity as writer as it has been constructed based on writing experiences in a variety of contexts important to the writer beyond academia. This is explained in more detail in the following chapter, which presents the method of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents an outline of the method used in the study, including the research design, research questions, details about the sampling technique and sample, the analytic technique employed and procedure of analysis, the origin and adaptation of the instruments used to gather data and the study's ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

The study is a purely qualitative research study. Qualitative research is concerned with discovering deeper meaning within a data set through elucidating recurring concepts in the data in order to capture the particular phenomenon being studied as accurately as possible (Neuman, 1997). Qualitative analysis is non-positivist in approach and deals with "...subjective meanings, definitions, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of specific cases" (Neuman, 1997, p. 329). Qualitative research is now also viewed as a rigorous approach to data analysis and has the advantage of being able to provide a deeper and richer exploration of data (Golafshani, 2003), which is useful when dealing with a nuanced subject like identity in context.

A qualitative approach to the study was indicated because, as the researcher, I wished to understand how South African adult ESL students construct their identities as writers, together with the experiences that have shaped this identity. The intention was to allow participants to speak through the data in their own, authentic voices in order to raise awareness of and sensitivity to what adult L2 writers may bring into the ESL classroom with them, and to represent this as accurately and richly as possible through a discovery of the themes that run through these experiences. The focus is on the individual experience of each participant as well as their perceptions and constructions of themselves as writers in English. Hence a qualitative approach was seen as the most suitable method of research as perceptions and constructions of identity are deeply and personally held, even if the processes take place socially.

3.2 Research Questions

The overarching research question of the study is: How do adult ESL students doing a short course in writing and grammar view their identity as a writer of English texts? Questions that inform the main question of the study include the following:

1. What are these students' self-perceptions as writers?
2. What are their attitudes to writing?
3. What are their attitudes towards themselves as writers?
4. What are their beliefs about their abilities as writers?

3.3 Method

3.3.1 Sampling and Sample

Purposive sampling was utilised in this study. Purposive sampling, also called judgemental sampling, is a technique in which a sample is chosen based on specific characteristics it may have or for a particular reason deemed appropriate by the researcher (Neuman, 1997). According to Neuman (1997, p. 206), one of the situations in which purposive sampling is indicated is when a deep understanding is required of certain cases that may be seen to be particularly informative.

Purposive sampling was considered an appropriate technique for this study because the specific characteristics of the sample chosen articulated well with the aim of the study, which was to examine how adult ESL students perceive and construct themselves as writers in English. Thus the most suitable sample would include adult speakers of English as a second language who have had experiences with writing in a variety of contexts, who would be able to articulate these experiences in an extended writing text and who were still in the process of developing their skills and, by extension, their identities as writers. To this end, students doing a short course in grammar and writing were approached to take part in the study.

The course was considered as a suitable source of possible participants because of its nature and content. In this particular course, students are introduced to five different styles of paragraphs and how to write each one. The second and complementary part of the course is

the grammar linked to the various writing styles. This includes the use of adjectives and adverbs for descriptive writing, transition signals and connectors for process writing and so on.

As the study is about writing identity, this course was also viewed as a suitable pool of candidates as students would take the class specifically to improve their English writing and so would be in the process of further developing their writing identity. Although the participants were doing a short course in writing and grammar, this study was less about their experiences as students as much research has been done on the creation of student identity. Rather it was more about these adults' experiences of writing and themselves as writers in various contexts.

In terms of the requirements of the data gathering instrument, students taking this course would have a level of English ability in reading and writing corresponding to a Level 3 on South Africa's National Qualifications Framework (that is, an NQF3), which is equivalent to Grade 11 or an Intermediate level of English. As such, students had prior English writing experience and were able to complete an extended writing task.

Two classes of adult students, one comprising 25 students and the other 18 students, were invited to take part in the study. Of these, a total of eight students elected to participate, which is a return rate of 18.6 percent. Of the eight respondents, six were male and two were female. Seven participants were South African while one was from another country. Two participants spoke Zulu as their home language, two spoke South Sotho, one spoke both Zulu and South Sotho as home languages and the remaining three spoke Xhosa, Tswana and French respectively as home languages. Participants ranged in age from 26 to 51 years old, with a mean age of 35.1 years.

3.3.2 Procedure

Before the study commenced, an application for ethical clearance was made, which included an information sheet (Appendix B) and a consent form (Appendix C). As the study was carried out at a language school, permission to conduct the study at the school was

sought and obtained from the school's director (Appendix A) before handing out the information sheet and consent form to students.

Questions from Sandman and Weiser's (1992) and Kasper's (1998) studies were utilised and adapted as prompts for two "writing autobiographies" (Sandman & Weiser, 1992) to be written by participants (Appendix D and Appendix E). The questions were also sent to the coordinator of the unit in which I work for comment and changes were made accordingly.

Each class was approached twice for data gathering purposes. The first time was in the fourth week of the course and the second time was during the penultimate lesson. Before I approached each class, I spoke to both teachers and arranged the most suitable time to come and speak to each class about the study so that I would not interrupt teaching time.

The first time I approached each class, I introduced myself and explained the nature of the study. I then handed out the information sheet and consent form (Appendix A and Appendix B) to each student and discussed pertinent issues of anonymity and confidentiality as well as data storage. I then handed out a self-sealing A4 envelope containing the first writing autobiography prompts (Appendix D) and sheets of paper on which to write. I explained that students could take the envelope home and look at the contents and read through the information sheet again before deciding whether or not to take part in the study. The following week, I visited both classes again briefly to collect writing autobiographies in sealed envelopes. I visited each class for a short period of time every week after that as some students indicated that they would like to take part in the study but had not yet completed their writing autobiography and would hand it in the following week. In all, eight students handed back completed writing autobiographies responding to the first set of prompts.

In the tenth week of the course, I approached each class with the second set of writing autobiography prompts in another self-sealing envelope, together with paper to write on and another copy of the information letter and consent form. I emphasised the voluntary nature of the study and also informed students that they were welcome to complete the second part of the writing autobiography even if they had not completed the first. Students were able to take the second set of question prompts home with them to decide whether they wanted to answer them. I collected these the following week, on the last day of the

course. In all, three students handed back responses to the second set of prompts, all of whom had completed the first writing autobiography as well. One of these had to be discarded as only a “spider diagram” had been completed and not enough information was present.

Data were then analysed using a thematic content analysis, combining the procedures of code development described by Boyatzis (1998) and thematic networks described by Attride-Stirling (2001).

3.3.3 Instrument

Two “writing autobiographies” (Sandman & Weiser, 1992) were requested from participants in response to question prompts adapted from the studies of Sandman and Weiser (1992, pp. 3-4) and Kasper (1998, p. 63). Using the questions from the first set of prompts as a guide (Appendix D), participants constructed an extended writing text that detailed their previous positive and negative writing experiences, their strengths and weaknesses as a writer in English and the experiences that have led them to these beliefs. The questions in the first writing autobiography were adapted from Sandman and Weiser (1992).

In the original study, the researchers used the questions as a pre-assessment tool for students wishing to enrol for a two-year college course. Rather than using an arbitrary writing sample to assess students’ language and writing ability before placement, Sandman and Weiser (1992) were interested in students’ own assessment of what they did and did not know about language and writing.

The second set of prompts (Appendix E) requested participants to write about their experiences of the course they had just completed and whether it had made any difference to how they saw themselves as a writer. These questions were adapted from questions asked by Kasper (1998) at the end of a course in which a non-judgemental feedback technique had been used to respond to students’ writing. In her study, Kasper (1998) had utilised the questions constructed by Sandman and Weiser (1992) in addition to four of her own in order to discover how students’ writing experiences were impacted by non-

judgemental feedback. Both studies yielded a rich data source, albeit for different purposes to the present study.

In the present study, the first writing autobiography yielded a richer source of data than the second writing autobiography. The first reason for this is that eight participants responded to the first writing autobiography whereas only three responded to the second writing autobiography, which will be discussed in more detail in the limitations to the study in Chapter Five. The second reason is that the first writing autobiographies were, on average, much longer than the second writing autobiography and contained more, and more detailed, information. The first writing autobiography was also more revealing in terms of participants' perceptions, concepts and beliefs about themselves as writers as a result of participants' reflections on their writing experiences and their perceptions of their capabilities as writers in English.

3.4 Data Analysis

The writing autobiographies were analysed by means of a thematic content analysis as described in Attride-Stirling (2001) and Boyatzis (1998).

According to Boyatzis (1998, p. 1), thematic analysis is primarily a "way of seeing" in which the initial steps are first 'to see' and then 'to see as something'. As a method of analysis, thematic analysis has been shown to be rigorous and is a methodical way of exploring ideas (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic analysis also allows the authentic voices of participants to speak through the data and allows for insights of varying depths into attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, experiences, perceptions and world views of participants (Butcher, Holkup, Park & Maas, 2001).

This method of analysis was appropriate for this study as the study sought to elucidate the experiences and perceptions of adult L2 writers embedded in various contexts. A thematic analysis allowed for important threads in participants' experiences and perceptions of themselves and writing to be extracted and examined, which shed light on important aspects of adult English second language learners' identities as writers and English language learners in the South African context, particularly given South Africa's educational history.

This method of analysis also corresponded to the criteria of rich rigour and credibility as described by Tracy (2010), particularly as thematic analysis lends itself to sifting through rich data in order to extract meanings that may otherwise go unnoticed.

I first completed an initial reading of the data in order to gain an overview of the content of each writing autobiography as well as an idea of all the writing autobiographies together. Thereafter, the steps described by Attride-Stirling (2001) were followed, complemented by techniques described in Boyatzis (1998). These steps will be described and explained below.

3.4.1 Step One: Segmentation

The first step as described by Attride-Stirling (2001, pp. 390-391) is to condense the data, devise a coding framework and then dissect the data into segments of text using the framework. According to Boyatzis (1998, p. 31), a useful thematic code is one which has a name, a definition, a description, a description of what would be excluded from that particular theme and positive and negative examples of how the theme would appear. Therefore, as data were read and re-read, recurring ideas were extracted, defined, described and labelled. This part of the process was largely inductive in nature in that the ideas were extracted from the data itself. This stage of the data analysis yielded 41 labels.

Once it was felt that the inductive labels had reached saturation point, the literature on various aspects of identity was then re-examined and recurring ideas in the literature were noted and the data examined again in light of these ideas. This part of the process was largely deductive in nature, as the labels were generated from a source external to the data, in this case, research findings and theoretical concerns. This stage of the data analysis yielded a further seven labels. A sample of both deductive and inductive labels can be found in the table in Appendix K.

It has been noted by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) that a combination of inductive and deductive processes in data analysis can increase the rigour of qualitative research, so utilising both an inductive and deductive coding process was seen as a way of enhancing the overall analysis of the data.

3.4.2 Step Two and Step Three: Abstraction and Refinement

The second and third steps of thematic analysis described by Attride-Stirling (2001, pp. 391-392) are to abstract and refine themes and begin organising them into clusters. Accordingly, the labels were then organised into basic themes. I clustered labels around each research sub-question because three out of the four questions corresponded to the three aspects of identity seen as important in this study, namely self-perception, self-efficacy and self-concept. In addition, each of the questions asked in both writing autobiographies activated between one and two of the three identity constructs, so there was alignment between identity constructs, writing autobiography questions and research questions.

Due to the interconnected nature of self-perception, self-efficacy and self-concept, some labels appeared more than once in the clusters around each question. Where recurring labels were clustered with other labels related to a particular identity construct and research question, nuances and subtleties related to an overall writing identity emerged. Thus, subtle differences between the constructs were brought to light, which was important considering the degree of interrelationship between the constructs.

The basic themes extracted from the clustering of labels were then clustered into organising themes which were then clustered into global themes. At each stage of clustering and extrapolation, greater levels of abstraction were achieved. Four global themes were abstracted from the data, each made up of between two and three organising themes. Each global theme also related to a corresponding research question, activating a particular identity construct.

Unlike other processes of thematic content analysis, there are no hierarchies within Attride-Stirling's (2001) particular analytic framework. Rather, it is possible to see the relationships between the themes and how they cluster to form themes at greater degrees of abstraction. The thematic clusters around each global theme may be found in Appendix G, Appendix H, Appendix I and Appendix J.

3.4.3 Step Four: Description

The fourth step in the analytic process described by Attride-Stirling (2001) is to re-read and describe the data through the lens of the themes abstracted in the previous step. This process necessitates moving between the data and the themes in a recursive way in order to link, describe and analyse areas of interest that come up. This was done and the results described and analysed in the following chapter.

3.4.4 Step Five: Presentation

The fifth step is to present a succinct summary of the thematic network, including the main themes and characteristics of the data. The purpose of summarising the thematic network is to present the themes and patterns in an explicit and condensed fashion to reinforce the information presented in the previous step (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

3.4.5 Step Six: Interpretation

The final step is to interpret themes and patterns in light of the original research questions and link these themes and patterns to the literature and theory underpinning the research (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Although this step would correspond to a separate discussion of the findings in light of the relevant literature, in this study the discussion and analysis have been incorporated into the description of the findings in Chapter Four. The process described by Attride-Stirling (2001) has therefore been slightly adapted to amalgamate Steps Four and Six.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Before participants were approached to take part in the study, ethical clearance was obtained (Appendix F) and permission to conduct the study at the school was sought from the school's director (Appendix A). When I approached participants for the first time, I explained the nature of the study verbally and handed out an information sheet (Appendix

B) that contained this information in writing. I explained the voluntary nature of the study and that there would be no consequences related to choosing not to take part or choosing to withdraw at a later stage.

Participants were informed of issues around anonymity and confidentiality as well as what I would do with their writing autobiographies once they had been handed to me. Participants were given the data gathering instrument to take home with them so that they could read through the information sheet and were asked to sign the informed consent form (Appendix C) and hand it in together with their writing autobiographies in the envelope provided. Participants were advised that a copy would be made of their writing so that notes could be made on this copy but that identifying details would be erased and a participant number substituted. Participants were also told that all data would be stored securely and, in the event that participants did not want their writing autobiographies back, raw data would be scanned and saved as a password protected file on a CD-ROM before the hard copies of the writing were destroyed.

Participants were informed that the data was being collected for the purposes of a research report and that various interested parties may read the report but that anonymity would be maintained at all times. Participants were given my contact details and were encouraged to contact me if they had any concerns or queries regarding either the study or their writing autobiographies. Participants were also informed that once the study was complete, they would be welcome to contact me to read the findings. I also told participants that I was interested in what they wrote rather than in how they wrote. It was important for me to reassure participants that I would not be judging their language use. I withdrew from the online groups created for both classes as well as from the process of setting and moderating examinations and the results administration process.

In addition to the above ethical considerations, participants' raw data has been retyped so that a sample may be included in the research report without any concern that participants may be identified by their handwriting. In addition, any identifying details within the text itself have been changed or deleted. Participant numbers are referred to rather than names. A writing autobiography sample may be found in Appendix L.

In order to further ensure anonymity, any identifying details related to the institution where the study took place have also been erased on the research information sheet and informed consent form given to the director.

In conclusion, this chapter has described the method of the study, including its aim, the data gathering instruments, procedures of data collection and analysis and ethical considerations. The following chapter presents a description and analysis of the data through the lens of the themes extrapolated.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents a general overview of texts written by participants and then a more detailed description and analysis of the data through four global themes of *Writing is a public (re)presentation of individual meaning and ability*, *Not yet competent*, *Ability is determined by effort* and *Resilience*. Each global theme is presented, followed by a more detailed description and analysis of each organising theme before a summary of the entire thematic network is given.

4.1 General Overview of Texts Written

Participants mentioned a number of text genres. There is therefore a range of texts written by participants and can be divided into texts written for educational purposes, texts written at work and texts written for personal expression. The most often-mentioned text written for educational purposes is the essay. Participants mentioned essays as being written at both school and the tertiary education level. Other texts written for educational purposes included dissertations, theses, entrance examinations, written summative assessments, letters, application forms, written answers to comprehension passages and journal articles. Texts written in the workplace included emails, speeches, reports, concept/preparation documents, training manuals, articles for professional journals and minutes, with emails and reports mentioned the most often. Texts mentioned in connection with personal expression included emails, speeches and poems.

4.2 Description and Analysis of Thematic Networks

Clustering of 24 basic themes and 11 organising themes around the research questions revealed four global themes across both the first and second writing autobiographies related to participants' attitudes to writing and their attitudes towards and beliefs about themselves as writers. Four global themes emerged. The first global theme emerged from

labels, basic themes and organising themes clustered around the research question *What are students' attitudes to writing?* This global theme was best identified as *Writing is a public (re)presentation of individual meaning and ability*. The second global theme emerged from labels, basic themes and organising themes that clustered around the research question *What are students self-perceptions as writers?* This global theme was best identified as *Not yet competent*. The third global theme emerged from labels, basic themes and organising themes that clustered around the research question *What are students' beliefs about their abilities as writers?* This global theme was best identified as *Ability is determined by effort*. The fourth global theme emerged from labels, basic themes and organising themes that clustered around the research question *What are students' attitudes towards themselves as writers?* This global theme was best identified as *Resilience*. Each of these will be discussed in more detail below.

4.2.1 Global Theme: Writing is a Public (Re)Presentation of Individual Meaning and Ability

In their writing autobiographies, participants made reference to a number of different texts, briefly listed above, as well as to the environments in which the texts were written and the audience for whom the texts were written, which led to the emergence of the global theme of *Writing is a public (re)presentation of individual meaning and ability* (Appendix G).

Of interest were the types of texts *not* written. No private texts such as journals or diaries were mentioned. In addition, texts such as SMSes, BBM messages, WhatsApp and MXit conversations, tweets, Facebook and other forum postings, blogs and online comments were conspicuous by their absence. This may be because participants do not have an online presence. Data from the key results of Census 2011 (StatsSA, 2012) show that only 21.4 percent of the South African population has a computer at home while 64.8 percent of the population does not have access to the Internet. South Africa is not at the forefront of Internet technology as the country's data bandwidth is among the slowest and most expensive in the world.

However, nearly 90 percent of South African households have a cellular telephone (StatsSA, 2012) that could be used as a platform for written texts such as SMSes, BBM messages and WhatsApp and MXit conversations, which are significantly cheaper methods of communication than voice-to-voice telephone calls over a cellular network. These texts can be seen as a particular genre as they have their own appropriate communication moves and specific language features. As a genre associated with technological innovation, these texts are often viewed as the domain of a younger sector of the population and do not form part of the privileged discourses of society.

Participants therefore had a more traditional view of what writing entailed and which genres constituted “real” writing, which happen to be the genres that require use of Standard English and which form part of the privileged discourses of education and the workplace. Writing, therefore, did take place for an audience but not necessarily for an audience of peers via social media.

In participants’ writing autobiographies, the texts described were presentations as well as representations. Participants presented their thoughts and ideas in writing as well as represented themselves and their abilities through their texts and within the contexts in which they and their texts were situated. The texts therefore became a two-dimensional and structured generic representation of the complexity of ideas, thoughts and abilities of their writers, as they do for every person who writes. I would argue that this experience is common for all writers, no matter the language in which they are writing.

For participants, the two most common contexts in which writing took place were the high-stakes environments of education and the workplace. As these are contexts in which the discourses of power and privilege are most valued, participants were tasked with communicating information, knowledge, thoughts and ideas in as linguistically accurate a manner as possible, particularly because the people who were in a position of power (bosses, teachers and lecturers) were more likely to judge the worth of participants’ ideas – and, by extension, the worth of the participants – based on the manner in which these ideas were communicated. Although there was no shortage of ideas and knowledge, the great challenge was in putting these across in English.

This global theme of writing as a public presentation and representation of individual meaning and ability comprises three organising themes, namely *Writing is social*, *Purposeful expression in writing is satisfying* and *Successful writing depends on good writing skills*. Each of these will be explored in more detail below.

4.2.1.1 Writing is Social

This organising theme relates specifically to the social aspect of writing as described by participants. Not only were the texts socially desirable (Norton, 1997) as the means of communication within the contexts in which the participants wrote, but there was also a clear sense of an audience when writing. Participants referred to “people”, “the world”, “my supervisor”, “colleagues”, “my boss”, “outside companies”, “the teacher”, “my friend”, “my parents”, “school children and teachers”, “the lecturer” and “my superiors” as the various audiences of their writing. In his writing autobiography, one participant addressed me directly in one of his comments as “the reader”.

Therefore, although participants described the texts they had written as well as their experience of writing them, the people who were going to read the texts (and possibly give feedback) were never far from the discussion, so the text itself could not be divorced from its context and purpose and the experience of writing did not happen as an act in isolation. Participants had an acute awareness of the audience, usually comprised of people who were in a position of power in relation to the writer and whose feedback had significant effects on the writer. (Feedback and its effects will be discussed in more detail in the second thematic network.)

In this study, the social contexts in which, as well as for which, the texts were produced were linked to either a positive or negative experience of writing. It appeared that texts produced within a high-stakes social context for an audience in a position of power, particularly an audience with whom the writer already had a connection, often tended to be an unhappy writing experience. Factors compounding unpleasant writing experiences and contexts were problems with using English, lack of vocabulary and difficulties with structuring the text.

...[O]ne time at high school when I was doing grade 9, we were given a topic to write about Xenophobia. It was a difficult [topic] for me because it was my first time hearing about that word. The teacher didn't explain to use [us] about that word, he just gave it to use [us]. I struggled [struggled] to much about that topic ... It took all of my time and energy and it was frustrating ... I delivered on time but I was unsatisfied because I got the mark that I wasn't expecting and that really hurt me. (Participant 3)

I had a lot of negative writing experiences, although in some of the time I enjoyed writing but when submitting the work the outcomes were not that lovely. The first of those was when I was at [a tertiary study institute] and I wrote on something like a story or something, I can't recall exactly what was it about but the lecturer was not impressed with my English. (Participant 7)

Sperling (1996, p. 64) refers to the audience of a written text as an "absent interlocutor" and notes that the writer's task is to divine and respond to the needs of this absent interlocutor. The more successful a writer is in considering the audience and adapting the text accordingly, the more successful the writing is considered to be. The one instance in which this is not the case is when the reader is the teacher due to the relationship between the student-writer and the teacher-reader as the evaluator and assessor of the text (Sperling, 1996).

Both participants quoted above had a negative experience related to writing an extended text for assessment purposes in an environment in which the assessment outcome determines an individual's progress, or lack thereof, through the educational system. Both were writing for a reader in a position of power and with whom a relationship of teacher-student had already been established. Both participants worked hard on the writing. Participant 3 found the process of researching and writing taxing due to the demands of the task and the lack of scaffolding while Participant 7 enjoyed the act of writing, which is where they diverged in their experiences. However, both texts were regarded as inferior by the powerful teacher-reader and both participants were penalised for this, with a poor mark in the case of Participant 3 and criticism in the case of Participant 7. The two-dimensional text was unable to accurately represent the effort put into the text and writing process. Instead, similar to Fernsten's (2008) findings, the text situated the participants as ineffective writers because all that could be seen through the text was the writers' inability to express themselves in a textually acceptable manner.

In contrast, writing was a good experience when the social context allowed writers to express themselves in a less high-stakes environment, for an audience of peers or for an audience with whom there was no existing relationship. There may have still been pressures of a different type and quality, but the writers were able to focus more on the process of writing than the result:

Secondly I could add the fact that I can communicate with my colleagues at work and also writing emails to people who are far from me. Emails are a good point of communication... (Participant 2)

...I wrote poems and people enjoyed my poems. (Participant 3)

[Writing a letter of motivation to get into a tertiary education course] was a positive experience for me. Writing the motivation letter enabled me to feel [feel] great at how I expressed myself. (Participant 5)

In each of these situations, there is still a clear idea of the audience for whom the text is written. However, the relationship between the writer and the audience was more egalitarian or the audience was so far removed that it ceased to be a threat. Although the text was still two-dimensional, in this social context it allowed a more truthful representation of the ideas, thoughts and feelings of the writer. Participants' positive experience of this type of writing could also be due to the expressivistic nature of the texts, in which the writer's voice is privileged more than correct structure and discourse and in which there is communication of deeply held individual meaning (Fernsten, 2008). Therefore, Participant 2's emails to people who are far away allow for an expression of personal voice and meaning, as do the poems – perhaps the ultimate public genre in which personal expression is communicated – of Participant 3.

Participant 3's experience in writing an essay compared to Participant 5's letter of motivation provides an interesting illustration of writing as a social presentation and representation of the self in different contexts. Although both texts were linked to a high-stakes educational context, the audience was different (teacher versus a disembodied registrar), confirming the findings in Sperling's (1996) review of the literature regarding the student-writer teacher-reader relationship. The purpose of the texts was also different (assessment versus a motivation to be admitted into a course of study). In terms of the

second text, although there was a risk that Participant 5 would be rejected, this did not detract from a satisfying writing experience through expressing and representing the self and abilities both at the time of writing and in recalling the experience.

This is in stark contrast to Participant 3's essay. The essay text was not able to represent the dynamic process of learning and change that Participant 3 underwent in finding out about a previously unknown concept (Xenophobia), interviewing people about their experiences with Xenophobia and then writing about it. Instead, the text became, or perhaps was required to be, a static artefact of structure and form (cf. Simpson, 2009), which was ultimately penalised for not being good enough. Participant 3's experience calls into question how best to represent learning at school level and whether this learning is more about the acculturation into the dominant societal discourses (Gee, 1996) than about personal change and growth brought about by exposure to different ideas, knowledge and experiences.

Thus, the writing experience could not be divorced from the social context in which it took place. Writing was also social because it was for a social and communicative purpose with an audience in mind. However, in some contexts the text was simply a "display of learning" (Simpson, 2009, p. 201) and a site of conflict between a competent writer identity and a deficient writer identity (Fernsten, 2008) while in others, the text allowed for personal expression and a happier writing experience in which there was greater harmony between the text, the expression of the self and the writer identity.

4.2.1.2 Successful Writing Depends on Good Writing Skills

A thread that ran through the data was that good English writing skills were integral to being able to write successfully. Writing skills were seen as comprising correct grammar (tenses, sentence construction), vocabulary (appropriate word choice, spelling), researching and integrating information and structuring the text correctly. In the second writing autobiography, the skills of re-reading, editing and presenting a correct final product were also mentioned, most likely due to the content of the course which emphasises this. Across

both writing autobiographies, good writing skills therefore took skills related to both the global and local levels of the text into consideration.

Nonetheless, participants' main focus was on grammar and vocabulary. Although participants were clearly aware of writing as a means of communication and a vehicle for expression of thoughts, feelings and ideas, tension between these aspects of writing and problems with the language in which they were expressed did exist:

Another, problem is the spelling sometime the root is the same but a "a" replaces "e" and reciprocally. (Participant 1)

The negative experience I face every day is with my spelling. I have a big problem with my spelling, it one of the things that makes writing to be difficult for me. The fact that I cannot write what I am thinking because of my spelling. (Participant 2)

...I can write but I need to improve on my writing [scheme]... (Participant 3)

I was not sure of my spellings and the way I express my feelings... I was ashamed to express myself through medium of English. It was difficult to construct a sentence. (Participant 4)

The strength I have, I think, is that I am creative and have original ideas. [...] The weakness: are the grammar and that I am a person who sometimes get easily distracted... (Participant 7)

The quotes above epitomise the emphasis placed on language skills and the way in which problems with English were seen as an impediment to successful expression. In particular, vocabulary, spelling and sentence construction were obstacles to writing effectively, made writing more difficult or created tension between having ideas and being unable to communicate these. This echoes findings in Silva's (1993) review of the literature that L2 writing is hampered by issues with grammar and vocabulary and that more emphasis is placed on grammar as an important characteristic of effective writing. From a purely surface perspective, the arduousness of L2 writing can be seen in Participant 1's deliberation to achieve the correct spelling, in Participant 2's difficulty with the precise articulation of thoughts, in Participant 3's need to work on textual structuring, in Participant 4's struggle with sentence construction and in Participant 7's conflict between creativity and grammar. As with Fernsten's (2008) student, the participants in this study struggled between an identity characterised by deficit, particularly in regard to grammar and vocabulary, and an identity shaped around a belief that the ideas expressed in the text had value.

Of interest in this thematic network was the connection participants made between the language skills necessary for writing in English and the other English skills of reading and speaking. Half of the participants referred to writing as being influenced by reading and speaking or as influencing speaking. Reading was seen as a way of increasing vocabulary by Participant 8 while Participant 1 used English texts to “acquire and adopt” correct English expressions and sentence structure. Participant 5 alluded to knowing that books are a source of words but noted a tendency to lose interest when reading. This could possibly be as a result of difficulties with vocabulary, which suggests a possible vicious cycle of writing being difficult because of a lack of vocabulary and reading, a good source of words, also being difficult because of a lack of vocabulary. In the second writing autobiography, all respondents mentioned reading as a way of improving their writing, which may have been on the advice of the course facilitators but also may have been as a result of reading done during the course.

In terms of speaking, Participant 6 made the observation that writing helped him improve his pronunciation and vocabulary and allowed for greater confidence when preparing for speaking activities. The link between speaking and writing was made very clear by Participant 8, who commented that *“[t]he reader may have noticed that I keep mentioning how important it is to speak English and write it while the topic is not about speaking English. It is not easy to write in English if you cannot speak it.”* Speaking is related to writing in the sense that both are social and communicative for an audience in mind (Sperling, 1996) and both use language in order to achieve this aim. The other links that participants made between writing and language skills of reading and speaking could also be explained as some of the ‘by-products’ of writing described by Katznelson, Perpignan and Rubin (2001), particularly related to students’ awareness of how writing, speaking and reading interact with each other in learning a language.

In addition to language skills, the necessity of researching, integrating knowledge and structuring texts for the presentation of a correct final product were also alluded to as part of what made writing successful. However, in situations in which these skills were necessary, writing was made more difficult due to lack of scaffolding. This happened most often in an educational setting. For example, Participant 1’s first scientific essay had to be rewritten by his supervisor because his ideas were disorganised. Participant 3 recounts

having to write an essay in Grade 9 on the topic of Xenophobia without having the word explained by the teacher giving the topic. In another instance, Participant 3 had to research another country and then write about it as an inhabitant, a challenging task of taking research and turning it into personal experience, which was very difficult because of a lack of travel experience. There is no mention of help from the teacher. Participant 5 struggled to write his first essay in 15 years for a part-time evening course at a university because of difficulty in deciding on relevance of information and structuring the 2000-word text. He managed to get assistance from the university's writing centre, but even so, meeting the word limit and organising the essay was difficult once he was writing by himself.

In these examples from participants' first writing autobiographies, there is a sense of expecting the students to know what to do without making the writing steps and text structuring skills explicit, even though something about the task was unfamiliar or it was the first time that participants were writing a particular text. It would appear that assistance with managing the writing process is absolutely necessary within an educational setting, no matter what the level of study, until students are confident enough to be able to manage it themselves.

In the second writing autobiography, process skills of brainstorming and then re-reading the text in order to edit and correct it were mentioned. There is thus a sense that at least three participants now have more confidence in writing as a process and knowing what to do when confronted with a writing task. This awareness is one of the explicit aims of the course, however. In situations in which these skills are not explicitly taught, students may very well be at a loss unless they are given some support.

It is therefore clear that good knowledge of writing skills was seen as very important to the successful execution of writing and that the language skills required were linked to the skills of reading and speaking in English. In addition, it may be necessary for teachers to help students manage writing tasks from the stage of setting the topic through brainstorming, researching and structuring writing to checking and editing the text up to the presentation of the final product through scaffolding, even if only for the first task.

4.2.1.3 Purposeful Expression in Writing is Satisfying

Despite the fact that the context in which writing takes place and the necessity of key writing skills often cannot be divorced from the experience of writing, participants also mentioned the act of writing in itself as an enjoyable experience because it allowed them to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas on paper. The audience or result obtained from the text appeared to be much less important than engaging with writing as a process of creation, as communication or as a representation of individual meaning. However, in one case, negative feedback from the audience also led to decreased enjoyment of writing over time.

The act of writing was most likely to be enjoyed when expression of thoughts, feelings and ideas was for a true communicative purpose within the discourse of expressivism (Fernsten, 2008) rather than as an exhibition of knowledge or ability (Simpson, 2009):

I will have to contact some persons in English [via email] ... English is then mostly positive experience, there is no 'marks' after, I am freed of this pressure. (Participant 1)

Secondly I could add the fact that I can communicate with my colleagues at work and also writing emails to people who are far from me [as a positive experience]. (Participant 2)

I had a lot of negative writing experiences, although in some of the time I enjoyed writing but when submitting the work the outcomes were not that lovely. (Participant 7)

Being able to use the language was still seen as essential to successful expression, but this was overtaken to some extent by the satisfaction of being able to communicate one's ideas in writing. As in Simpson's (2009) study, participants in this study were active agents in constructing meaning through written text. Participants 1, 2 and 7 allude to the satisfaction of writing without the pressure of assessment, that is, without the need to perform (Ivanič, 1994), although in Participant 7's case, this satisfaction became frustration due to criticism from the readers of his texts. This criticism appeared to stem from a focus on what was 'broken' (Fernsten, 2008) in Participant 7's writing, without regard for or acknowledgement of interesting and original ideas in the text. This links back to Participant 7's texts as a site of struggle between his identity as creative and his interpretation of grammar as one of his weaknesses as a writer.

Participant 5 succinctly summed up the intrinsic satisfaction of writing when reflecting on a speech that he wrote for an audience of school children and teachers:

When I was preparing this speech and during my writing, it challenged my thinking abilities. It was positive because I managed to put all my points by expressing how I felt and I was able to engaged my thoughts [...] I think writing helps individual express themselves in a deep and far reaching manner that an individual wouldn't have probably have able to express in taking [talking]. (Participant 5)

In this quote, Participant 5 neatly captures the pull between writing and speaking as ways of expressing thinking. The act of writing allowed him to express the depth and breadth of his thinking as an active author/authority (Ivanič, 1994) by engaging with the subject matter through the text. By stating that he “managed to put all [his] points”, Participant 5 alludes to being able to present his ideas logically, clearly and coherently in his text, so not only was he able to express his ideas but he was also able to do so in the ordered way demanded by the genre of a prepared speech. Although a prepared speech is similar in structure to an essay with an introduction, body and conclusion, it is a written text that is presented orally and so represents an intersection between writing and speaking. Unlike utterance, it is not a spontaneous production of thinking but unlike a written text that is read by a third person after it has been produced, there is a connection between the speaker and the audience that occurs in real time with the opportunity for an immediate response. Nonetheless, the writing of the speech offered Participant 5 a deeply satisfying communicative experience with an opportunity to reflect on the difference between writing and speaking.

4.2.1.4 Summary of Global Theme: Writing is a Public (Re)Presentation of Individual Meaning and Ability

Overall, the global theme of *Writing is a public (re)presentation of individual meaning and ability* was characterised by three aspects of writing. One aspect described the social context in which writing takes place. Writing was seen as a social and communicative act that takes place within a social context, usually for an audience or with a reader in mind. The other two aspects of this global theme recognised the tension between the purpose and pleasure of writing as communication and the necessity of having good writing skills in order

to be able to write successfully. This particular global theme could be seen to relate to how participants view the art and skill of writing. Writing allowed participants to present their ideas, thoughts and feelings while representing themselves within these ideas, thoughts and feelings. Writing was also seen as a presentation of various skills necessary for writing and for the representation of the self as a particular kind of writer as a consequence of being able to utilise those skills.

This thematic network contains ideas similar to Simpson's (2009) view of the writer as agentive and passive, writing as display and as a way of making meaning and writing as individual and social. In considering this thematic network together with these three continua, the first two of Simpson's themes have significance for the experience of writing in English as a second language as experienced by the participants in this study. However, Simpson's framing of the themes in his study as continua is problematic. Although this was purposeful so that the themes were not viewed as binary opposites, the concept of a continuum implies opposite ends in which one aspect of the theme is foregrounded as the other is backgrounded. In addition, framing the themes as continua suggests that writers and writing can be placed at points along the continuum depending on the confluence of factors in each writing context. As writers, the participants in this study could be placed on the continuum of agentive and passive together with their writing as a display and as making meaning. These two continua appear to work in tandem. Writers are most likely to be agentive when they are engaged in making meaning, as in the experiences of Participant 2 and Participant 5, but can be positioned closer to the passive end of the continuum by a reader who punishes the writer for not engaging in the correct writing display or who only sees what is 'broken' in the text, as in the experiences of Participant 3 and Participant 7.

This thematic network challenges the idea of writing as being able to be placed on an individual and social continuum. Instead, more in line with Ivanič (1994), writing is always a social act, even as it takes place individually. This is partly due to the imagining of an audience, the all-pervasive *everybody* articulated by Beck (2001), and the socially constructed conventions of language and text structure, but is also due to the fact there is almost always an audience for a written text, even if it is the same person reading something they themselves had written earlier.

Considering the experiences of the participants in this study, it may be more accurate to frame the individual/social aspect of writing as concentric circles, rather than a linear continuum. Concentric circles would allow the individual to be seen as located within the social as well as moving within and influencing the social, but with a clearer recognition of its omnipresence and influence on the experience of writing.

4.2.2 Global Theme: Not Yet Competent

The second thematic network to be described and analysed is the network that clusters around the global theme of *Not Yet Competent* (Appendix H). This particular global theme links to participants' self-perceptions, or how they see themselves as writers in English, and is characterised by negotiation between how they are seen versus how they see themselves, between their own limitations versus what they would like to be able to know and between their weaknesses and strengths.

The notion of being 'not yet competent' suggests that, although participants do not view themselves as being skilled and proficient writers in certain areas, there is room for growth and learning to take place and that skills can be learnt and proficiency can be attained.

Participants' self-perceptions appear to be strongly influenced by how they are perceived by the audience. There is also, however, a clear sense of being able to see one's own strengths and weaknesses as well as abilities and inabilities as a writer through one's own self-perceptions in addition to engagement with the text.

Participants therefore negotiate the space between others' perceptions of them as writers and their own perceptions based on their knowledge of themselves as writers. Within this space, participants also negotiate their awareness of their limitations as writers and the desire for growth fuelled by this knowledge.

The organising themes that cluster around this global theme are *Self-perception is through the lens of feedback from the environment*, *Lack of knowledge feels bad* and *Knowledge of self allows for change*. Each organising theme will be described and analysed in more detail below.

4.2.2.1 Self-Perception is Through the Lens of Feedback from the Environment

As discussed in the previous thematic network, writing takes place in a social context, usually for an audience. To extend this idea, the response of this audience to the texts written by participants had a profound influence on how participants saw themselves, or their self-perception. Much of the feedback mentioned by participants in their writing autobiographies was negative. Although some feedback from the audience was positive in certain contexts, good writing experiences tended to be associated with the satisfaction of being able to express oneself successfully as well as being rewarded in various ways while bad writing experiences were associated with negative feedback from the audience.

The audience used a variety of feedback strategies in response to the texts read, to which participants themselves responded in various ways. Interestingly, much of the feedback centred on participants' limitations with English as opposed to the content of the text itself.

One feedback strategy was assigning a number to a text indicative of how well or badly the writer had done, that is, giving marks:

...in the first term [of first year university] the mean of my English note was 12.5/100 because writing was a big challenge... (Participant 1)

I delivered [my essay] on time but I was unsatisfied because I got the mark that I wasn't expecting and that really hurt me. (Participant 3)

A second strategy was pointing out a problem and giving advice on how to overcome it:

...[somebody] told me about my spelling that I should concentrate when I am writing so that I will not make this mistakes. (Participant 2)

A third strategy was removing the participant as the agent of the text and replacing them with someone else. This occurred with one participant in writing and another in speaking:

The first scientific article that I have to write was so a problem that my supervisor has to rewrite it entirely before I add modifications. (Participant 1)

The most frustrating part was when I talk and while I am still talking someone conclude a sentence for me. (Participant 8)

A fourth strategy was criticism, both personal and relating to the text:

...the lecturer was not impressed with my English. She said I would not work for an international company because of my English. Then I wrote a report [at work] recently. [...] [a superior] complained about my wording, my sentence structures and that I wrote half or incomplete sentences. (Participant 7)

In each case of feedback cited above, the audience focused on what was 'broken' in the text. Writers' deficits were foregrounded, leading to a self-perception of a lack of competence in writing in English. Receiving poor marks for work in an educational context was associated with a decrease in self-esteem and a particularly negative experience of writing as evidenced by Participant 1 and Participant 3's comments.

With regards to Participant 2's problem with spelling, pointing out spelling mistakes and offering as advice that the writer should concentrate when writing, although well meaning, reflects more on the reader's lack of understanding of the mechanics of English than on the lack of ability of the writer. As Harmer (2007) argues, spelling mistakes that English second language speakers make are mainly as a result of complicated English orthography and the complex relationship between phonemes and graphemes rather than a lack of care or lack of learning.

In terms of the third feedback strategy, Participant 1 and Participant 8's experiences of being replaced effectively stripped them of any authority and reduced them from being agentive to being a spectator at the creation of their own text.

Of interest is Participant 7's experience with criticism from his lecturer and from a superior at work. London (1995) argues that criticism is a type of destructive feedback and is an ineffectual strategy employed when the criticiser wants the person being criticised to change their behaviour. In this case, the desired behaviour change would be from writing in a type of English viewed as unacceptable with grammatical and sentence construction errors to writing in a grammatically correct way with complete sentences, correct spelling and appropriate word choice. To some extent, this criticism may have been a factor in Participant 7's decision to take English classes. However, more interestingly is the effect that it had on Participant 7's perception of himself and of writing overall.

Participant 7 initially enjoyed writing but after being faced with repeated criticism over time, writing began to be experienced as a frustrating and aversive experience. The opening sentence of Participant 7's writing autobiography stated that he had never had a good experience of writing, even though he sometimes found the act of writing enjoyable. The lack of a good experience of writing could be directly attributed to the anticipation of negative feedback he received from his readers. Participant 7 saw grammar as his weakness and internalised his incomplete sentences as being as a result of a negative personal characteristic of being easily distracted. As London (1995) notes, destructive feedback is also associated with decreases in self-efficacy perceptions, a viewpoint confirmed by Pajares (2003, p. 142) who also describes self-efficacy variables as having to be operationalized using the modal auxiliary "can" which signifies an evaluation of an individual's capability. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that Participant 7 does not once mention something that he can do with regards to writing, an indication that his perceived self-efficacy had diminished. This is particularly so considering the words "can" and "able" are used several times throughout all the other writing autobiographies.

Most of the feedback mentioned in the writing autobiographies was given by an audience in a position of power in relation to the writer and all strategies impacted on participants' self-perception or perception of the experience of writing. As a result of the feedback received, participants viewed writing as a bad experience, felt hurt, embarrassed or ashamed or internalised language issues as weaknesses.

In cases where the environment was more affirming, participants had a much better self-perception. Writing poems for people's enjoyment led to a belief in writing and a perception of being able to write and learn new words for one participant, while being recognised at work for his improvement in his writing skills allowed another participant to perceive himself as being a successful language student and successful writer.

It is therefore very clear that the content and delivery of feedback changed how writers saw themselves and also impacted on their experience of writing. Feedback could either be constructive or destructive (London, 1995) and, as such, impacted either positively or negatively on participants' self-perception. This was particularly true of participants' self-perception of their capabilities as writers, or their self-efficacy beliefs.

4.2.2.2 Lack of Language Knowledge Feels Bad

Although a great deal of participants' self-perception was influenced by feedback from the audience, participants also viewed themselves in a certain way based on their relationship with the text written. Some participants viewed themselves and their writing tasks through the lens of fear, embarrassment and shame. This was either as a result of the task itself, a result of difficulties with language or a result of the imagined response of a perceived audience:

I was nervous because my tenses were not good. My English was not good. I was not sure of my spellings and the way I express my feelings. I thought no one will be interested to read my letter. I was afraid to show my friends and my parents... I was ashamed to express myself through medium of English. (Participant 4)

My strength [in writing] will be understanding when ever someone is explaining to me. I sometimes understand in a group however when it is time for me to implement, it then become a nightmare. (Participant 5)

I used to hate comprehension with all my heart. When I don't understand what is asked by the question that normally gives me a sleepless night and takes away my eating appetite. (Participant 6)

There were times when I felt like writing in English was not only difficult but frustrating and unsatisfying for me. Not being able to use the language led me to not being able to do things I wanted to try to do because I did not want to embarrass myself in front of my peers. (Participant 8)

These quotes reveal the affective states experienced by participants when confronted by a task that required writing in English or reading and then writing. Participant 4's affective state ranged from anxiety and fear to feelings of shame related to using English as the language of expression. This was particularly related to anticipation of a negative response from the audience. Participant 5's evocative use of the word "nightmare" to describe writing unaided is suggestive of an affective state of terror caused by writing as a threat to his physical, psychological or spiritual wellbeing. Acute anxiety caused by Participant 6's problems with understanding comprehension passages and being unable to formulate a written answer as a result interfered significantly with his biological rhythms, disturbing both his sleep and his appetite. Participant 8 imposed limitations on himself in order to avoid the sting of embarrassment.

All the participants quoted above suffered from language and writing anxiety as evidenced by their descriptions of their affective states. Results of an exploratory study Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert (1999) indicate that writing anxiety (albeit in student writers at university level) may occur as a result of fear of evaluation, as in Participant 4 and Participant 8's situations, low self-confidence, as in Participant 5's case, and an aversive affective state, as in Participant 6's case. Interestingly, it was students' perceptions of their capabilities in Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert's (1999) study that determined their levels of anxiety, as opposed to their actual capabilities, which overlaps directly with Bandura's (1977) assertion that beliefs about one's abilities are a more potent determinant of self-efficacy than one's actual capabilities.

There is thus a strong link between anxiety and beliefs about one's self-efficacy (Cheng, 2002) which is also supported by the viewpoints of the participants above, in which there were perceptions of being unable to do something, from being unable to use tenses and construct sentences effectively, being unable to understand a reading passage and respond in writing, being unable to write unaided to being unable to do certain desired things for fear of being embarrassed. These perceptions may very well have depended on previous mastery experiences in which participants did not succeed, but together with the affective states of fear and anxiety, they have the potential to become very powerful mediators of avoidance behaviour.

However, these viewpoints sometimes conflicted with other, more positive self-perceptions, creating a situation characterised by having to negotiate the space between participants' desire to write effectively and a sense of holding back or being held back by perceived limitations. This was sometimes characterised by the tension between being creative and having good ideas, but being unable to express these successfully or wishing to communicate something but being ashamed or embarrassed by not having the language skills with which to do this. This once again recalls Fernsten's (2008) study and the area of identity conflict between competence and deficit as well as the process of identity shaping described by Harklau (2000). The site of conflict may be the site at which change in the identity is starting to take place.

4.2.2.3 Knowledge of Self Allows for Change

Respondents also showed insight into and awareness of their writing selves and they evaluated their skill in writing in light of their self-knowledge. This was apparent in both the first and second writing autobiographies. All participants had a very clear idea of the areas in which their limitations were apparent as well as the skills, knowledge and abilities they wished to have. Although in a few instances the lack of skills, ability and knowledge led to feelings of shame, fear and embarrassment, the area between an understanding of limitations and the desire for an ideal knowledge, skill and ability set also appeared to be a space in which learning and change could take place.

For example, although writing was viewed as a limitation by Participant 1, his skill in reading allowed him to improve his writing through imitation and vocabulary development. Although he noted that he had difficulties with spelling, he was aware of the spelling changes to words from his home language to English as well as ‘false friends’, or words that look similar across languages but which have different meanings. It appears that in this area of awareness, his development as a writer in English can take place. Similarly, Participant 3 acknowledged a need to improve on her writing scheme or structure, which indicates an insight into a current level of ability as compared to an ideal level of ability. Within this area of awareness, growth can occur.

In terms of awareness of limitations, the realisation sometimes occurred as a result of being in a situation in which participants were confronted by their inabilities. For example, when asked to give a speech on behalf of his company, Participant 4 noticed that he had a “problem” with expressing himself in English and that when he arrived at the language school, he realised that he needed to learn more English. In other cases, the realisation came about as a result of a more internal process. For example, Participant 6 did a “self-introspection” on his language skills and, dissatisfied with the result, chose to enrol for a language course.

In the second writing autobiographies, this space between current skill and ideal skill was also apparent, as was what it would take to fill it:

Also so specific grammar points haven’t been studied in the short time of the lessons and I have to read more English text to learn these points. (Participant 1)

I think complex writing, like writing a report or compiling a training manual will need more practice and developed. I also think I need to be more discipline and re-read my work to be able to correct my work which is something that I need to do more. (Participant 7)

Both Participant 1 and Participant 7 had a greater awareness of what would be necessary to bring their English knowledge and skill set to a level they would perceive as acceptable. The space between current skill and ideal skill could therefore be filled with more attention to the writing process, reading more or consulting texts and practising writing. In mentioning what they could do to increase their skill level, participants were also more aware of themselves as active agents of learning and writing, which relates to Simpson's (2009) theme of writer as agentive and passive.

Although the space between participants' perceived current skill and knowledge set and ideal skill and knowledge set appeared at first glance to be similar to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) in which learning takes place through a continuous collaboration between novice and someone more capable (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994), the journey through the space described above could be viewed as being more individual and self-directed. The change that takes place in this space could be seen as a consequence of self-motivated behaviour directed by self-referent evaluation, goal-setting and the anticipation of feelings of satisfaction once these goals are reached, described by Bandura and Schunk (1981). Although participants saw attending a language course as one way of enhancing their skills, the decision to do so came about as a result of self-referent evaluation and an assumption of personal responsibility for their development. It is therefore clear that participants' current perception of themselves as writers appeared to be coupled with an unspoken perception of what they would like to be as writers and that it is in this space that learning can take place, self-efficacy beliefs can be strengthened and parts of their identity can shift.

4.2.2.4 Summary of Global Theme: Not Yet Competent

In summary, this global theme of *Not yet competent* was characterised by three aspects of the perception of the self as writer. One aspect described how feedback impacted on self-

perception. The audience used various feedback strategies that had a significant influence on how participants saw themselves as writers as well as how they viewed the experience of writing. Often, the feedback and its influence were negative. In cases in which it was positive, participants displayed increased self-esteem and self-confidence. The second aspect related to how participants felt as a result of a self-perception of language issues as a weakness. In some respects, participants felt bad about their level of skills as a result of their problems with using English effectively in writing. However, the third aspect of this global theme was related to how knowledge of the self allows for change. This knowledge came about in three ways – as a result of feedback, through self-examination or through realising something about an aspect of the self when confronted by a situation that revealed a problem, consistent with research cited by Markus and Wurf (1987) on self-awareness and self-evaluation following from social comparisons, self-appraisal and perceptions of the self. Although participants are aware of themselves and their current skill level, there is also awareness of an ideal skill level. In this space, there is room for learning, practice, growth and, ultimately, a possible change in self-perception.

To some extent, this shift can be viewed as accommodation or assimilation into the dominant writing discourses in education and the workplace. Although there may be tension between the currently acknowledged writing skill set and the ideal writing skill set, little, if any, resistance to dominant discourses was apparent in participants' writing autobiographies. The aim appeared to be to get to a level of competence where the audience of powerful others could be perceived as an audience of peers and at which participants could be satisfied with the results of a self-evaluation. Studies such as those conducted by Fernsten (2008), Harklau (2000), Ouellette (2008) and Thesen (1997) tend to highlight resistance to the dominant discourses as an aspect of the student-writer identity in academia. This study diverges from those because it appeared that participants did not engage in resistance behaviours against the dominant and privileged societal discourses but instead sought to become a part of these discourses. This does not mean that there was no resistance in any form. Some resistance was, in fact, apparent, which will be discussed in the final thematic network.

4.2.3 Global Theme: Ability is Determined by Effort

The third global theme that emerged was *Ability is determined by effort* (Appendix I). This particular theme links to participants' beliefs about their abilities both as writers and as language learners. It is characterised by participants' recognition of what they can and cannot do as writers and users of English as well as the effort required to develop their abilities. The idea of ability being determined by the effort that participants' put into their growth as writers and language learners suggests that participants view the development of their abilities as being within their power to control. There is therefore a sense of responsibility for one's own learning and development, as mentioned in the previous thematic network.

This global theme comprises two organising themes, *Writing ability depends on English language ability* and *Success is based on personal effort*, which will be discussed in more detail below. As these organising themes relate to participants' beliefs about their abilities as writers, they link directly with participants' perceptions of their self-efficacy.

4.2.3.1 Writing Ability Depends on English Language Ability

As discussed in the first global theme, participants viewed being able to write successfully as depending on a variety of good writing skills, one of which was language. Knowledge of correct grammar and appropriate vocabulary was seen as foundational to being able to write well. Participants therefore had a clear idea that their writing ability rested on their ability to use English effectively. To expand on this, this theme developed the idea that being able to use English appropriately and effectively was central to participants' self-confidence as a writer. In addition, participants' self-awareness regarding what they were able to do showed a sense of confidence in their current abilities as well as in their ability to develop as writers:

By repeating the classic structure [of sentences in English texts], I can slowly learn to write fluently in English. (Participant 1)

Part of this also made me to be proud of myself to attend at the school and be able to write English. Secondly I could add the fact that I can communicate with my colleagues at work... (Participant 2)

I can now write and I also believe in my writing... (Participant 3)

Knowing how to speak and write in English is one of the things that gives me confidence when I am speaking with people in general and colleagues. [...] Being able to write and speak English and combining it with skills I [struck out: have] has learnt at tertiary have enabled me to express my ideas with confidence. [...] Even though I am not yet the most effective communicator in writing and speaking English, I am happy that I can do my [work] with confidence and write letters to people at all levels of profession. ... I am so proud of myself for being able to identify my weakness and work on it... (Participant 8)

All participants above expressed a clear sense of efficacy in either their writing ability or their ability to learn to write. In each of the participants' comments, capability was expressed through the auxiliary modal "can" or its synonym "able" as these two words operationalize the self-efficacy concept (Pajares, 2003). Thus, Participant 1 had a self-efficacy belief related to an ability to learn to write Standard English through the process of reading and imitating English writing structure and Participant 2 had a self-efficacy belief related to an ability to write and communicate with people via email. Participant 3 had a general self-efficacy belief related to an ability to write as opposed to a previous inability, which is similar in idea to items in the category of General Progress in the Writer Self-Perception Scale (Bottomley, Henk & Melnick, 1998). In the short excerpt above, Participant 8 expressed a sense of general self-efficacy through no fewer than three repetitions of the word "able" and two repetitions of the word "can" (one of which is tacit). Participant 8's comment also provides an illustration of the generalisability of self-efficacy across domains (Bandura, 1977). Being able to write and speak English increased Participant 8's sense of self-efficacy in his work as well as a sense of self-efficacy related to a more general ability to change at a personal level through transforming perceived weaknesses into strengths.

Participants expressed a deeper awareness and greater confidence in their language awareness and writing abilities in the second writing autobiography. For Participant 1, having a condensed review of grammar over the 11-week course helped him to utilise the grammar rules in his writing. He also noted a progressive increase in his ability to write fluently over the duration of the course. Participant 7's second writing autobiography showed great development in his self-awareness. He was able to see what he could do to make his writing more effective.

The opposite side of this particular coin is the effect that the perception of an inability had. Consistent with the viewpoint that “[p]eople fear and tend to avoid threatening situations they believe exceed their coping skills” (Bandura, 1977, p. 194), a perceived lack of ability in writing or in using the English language effectively led to decreased engagement with texts, the environment or with other people. Examples of this included allowing a text to be rewritten by someone else, not feeling confident enough to be able to do a job that required more writing of different genres, choosing to keep quiet rather than express oneself due to a perception of not being able to use the language correctly, decreased enjoyment in writing as an act in itself, or imposing limitations on activities in the workplace or career path due to an inability to express oneself effectively. The danger in these courses of action is that they can lead to a decreased sense of self-efficacy through repeated avoidance of situations in which mastery may have been possible.

Nonetheless, although a perceived (or actual) inability had a profound effect on some participants’ lives in terms of choices they made as a result, there was another dynamic that played out in counterpoint to self-limitation or decreased engagement, while strengthening self-efficacy beliefs that were already apparent. This was the idea that success is based on personal effort, discussed below.

4.2.3.2 Success is Based on Personal Effort

The idea of success being based on personal effort contained two complementary threads in participants’ first writing autobiographies. The first thread comprised strategies that participants utilised in order to overcome various obstacles related to writing and language use in texts.

Most of the strategies mentioned were used to deal with difficulties with vocabulary and spelling:

...by transforming a bit French words, I can find the English word close (even if it is very old English). (Participant 1)

The fact that I cannot write what I am thinking because of my spelling. I end up thinking of words which have a similar meaning but which I am able to spell. With that problem it makes my work take longer to finish. (Participant 2)

I had to check words from the questions which were similar to those appearing from the story itself and write them as answers, because I never understood what was happening in the comprehension. (Participant 6)

I always try not to use word that I am not familiar with because I know that one word can change the entire mean in a sentence. (Participant 8)

Strategies mentioned above included changing words in the first language in order to find similar words in the second language, substituting a word where the spelling was known for a word where the spelling was unknown, looking for and using the same words that appear in a text and a question about the text to construct a written answer to the question and avoiding unfamiliar words. These are cognitive strategies primarily intended to decrease participants' perceived language deficits. At the same time, participants appeared to be formulating rules for how the language works (for example, words that are spelled with an 'e' in French are spelled with an 'a' in English) or for how they could work within the constraints of their existing language knowledge (for example, thinking of synonyms for words in which the spelling was unknown or avoiding unknown words so as not to inadvertently change the meaning of a sentence). Learning strategies were present in addition to the cognitive strategies. In terms of deconstructing the topic and structuring a text, two participants mentioned asking for help. One participant's source of help was a family member while the other participant went to a writing centre to get assistance.

It is therefore clear that participants were actively trying to help themselves to find a way around their issues and limitations. Self-regulation is a prominent idea in the research on self-efficacy and includes, among other concepts, the use of strategies to assist learning and development (Pajares, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000), which is related to perceived locus of control (Schunk, 1991). Although the strategies used by participants are not necessarily learning strategies in the classic sense, participants were proactive agents of their own learning and development through the use of strategies to help themselves. Learning about writing and writing effectively appeared to be seen as being within participants' own control as opposed to being environmentally determined. There was also a sense of being active in the process of writing rather than surrendering to the experience of limitations.

The second, complementary thread within this theme extended the idea of not surrendering. This thread captured the value of persistence and perseverance in the face of obstacles as its main idea. Despite the difficulties associated with writing in English, it appeared to be important not to give up. Interestingly, this thread was so strong that it was among the first labels to be recognised and described, and was mentioned explicitly by five of the eight participants:

The fact that I cannot spell it does not mean I should stop writing. (Participant 2)

I can now write and I also believe in my writing although I am strangling [struggling] with spelling but I believe if [I] persevere my spelling will be good. (Participant 3)

I told myself that I can speak English and nobody is perfect in life. English is just like any language on earth. I told myself that without trying you cannot know a thing. I should keep on speaking it and writing it until I get it right. (Participant 4)

I still feel shy and not confident enough about my English skills but I'm working on it and hope to get it right soon. (Participant 6)

Even though writing in English was my weakness, but I did not let it stop me from progressing with my studies. [...] Knowing my weaknesses is good because it helps to do something to overcome them and convert them into my strengths [strengths]. (Participant 8)

Phrases and ideas like not letting something prevent one from doing something (participant 1 and Participant 8), persevering and working on an issue to get it right (Participant 3, Participant 4 and Participant 6), trying and overcoming (Participant 8) confirm a theme of perseverance and persistence, in which participants viewed themselves as agents of their own development as writers in English and in which there was a clear determination to succeed. Participant 8's comments appeared to encapsulate a global notion of perseverance held by most participants, of not being bowed by the recognition of a problem or weakness but instead using it as a springboard to development and growth.

Perseverance was also seen implicitly in Participant 5's journey in writing his first essay during his studies. Even though the process of writing was described as "hard", "challenging" and "difficult", he sought help and did not give up. This mirrors Participant 3's experience of writing the essay on Xenophobia. There was a struggle, help was sought, a lot of time and energy was expended on the process and the essay was delivered on time. At no point is there mention of giving up. In his second writing autobiography, Participant 7

mentions the need to practice and develop skills learnt during the course, which is suggestive of learning and persevering. A change in tone is also apparent from Participant 7's first writing autobiography to his second. In his first writing autobiography, he was in the process of becoming disillusioned with his writing and his enjoyment of the process was becoming a sense of frustration due to the negative feedback he was receiving. In his second writing autobiography, he is more aware of aspects of the writing process that will be helpful in structuring his writing and making it more reader-friendly, as well as the need to practice. Although there was a sense in his first writing autobiography of being on the brink of developing an aversion to writing, the tone of his second writing autobiography is much less distressed and frustrated and is more concerned with growth.

As with self-regulation, the concept of perseverance and the construct of self-efficacy are strongly linked (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Pajares, 2003; Pajares & Johnson, 1994). Self-efficacy beliefs determine the degree of effort an individual invests in a task as well as the length of time spent on the task in the face of aversive experiences. High self-efficacy is therefore correlated with higher levels of persistence on tasks that are construed as challenging. As one source of information about self-efficacy is obtained from a successful mastery experience of a task, successfully completing a challenging task will also increase one's self-efficacy beliefs. In addition to participants' experiences discussed above, the sample was enrolled for a course at a language school at the time of data collection. I would therefore argue that this gives additional support to the impression that perseverance and persistence are characteristic of all the participants. They were actively seeking to change what they experienced as limitations in their English writing into strengths, learning and persevering as adult students. Considering the link between self-efficacy and perseverance, it would appear that the participants in this study have a fairly high level of belief in their self-efficacy as writers, which significantly influences their achievement motivation and their corresponding success as writers in English.

4.2.3.3 Summary of Global Theme: Ability is Determined by Effort

The ideas contained in the global theme *Ability is determined by effort* revealed two aspects of how participants viewed themselves as writers in English. The first was related to their

ability to write English and how this depended on their ability to use the English language. Knowing how to use English to write effectively was central to participants' self-confidence as a writer, while not knowing how to use English appropriately led to decreased engagement with texts, people or participants' work or study contexts. However, there was also a clear sense in this theme that participants viewed their success as writers in English as based on their personal effort. This captured the ideas of overcoming obstacles through using strategies to help oneself, being determined to succeed and persevering in the face of obstacles and the experience of limitations. These two aspects intertwined to form a theme that captured a sense of personal autonomy in the development of writing self-efficacy and which confirms an incremental learning perspective in which individuals set learning goals and persevere in the attainment of these goals "...because they believe effort enhances ability" (Schunk, 1991, p. 223).

4.2.4 Global Theme: Resilience

The fourth and final thematic network to be described and analysed is the network that clusters around the global theme of *Resilience* (Appendix J). This network describes how participants conceptualised themselves as writers in English and is related to the identity construct of self-concept. It is also characterised by how participants evaluated themselves as writers and is an identity aspect that simultaneously rests on and resists a particular educational self-construction. Although participants evaluated themselves as second-language speakers in terms of their writing abilities and three participants made explicit reference to the disadvantage of learning English as a second language at school, self-evaluation was instrumental in revealing limitations so that goals could be set. In addition to setting goals, the view that making mistakes was seen as integral to the learning process helped create a sense that limitations could be overcome. The organising themes that cluster around the global theme of *Resilience* are *Self-evaluation is based on writing abilities*, *Educational experience has limited abilities* and *Limitations can be overcome*. Each organising theme will be described in more detail below.

4.2.4.1 Self-Evaluation is Based on Writing Abilities

Although this theme may be seen as similar to the organising theme of *Self-perception is through the lens of feedback from the audience* due to the close relationship between the two identity constructs interpreted through each theme, this organising theme *Self-evaluation is based on writing abilities* deals with how participants evaluated and assessed themselves as writers rather than simply how they viewed themselves. Generally, writing limitations led to lowered self-esteem and self-confidence while writing effectively led to a sense of pride and increased self-confidence.

Self-evaluation as a writer was based on participants' writing abilities as determined by participants' self-awareness together with feedback from the audience. As with self-efficacy beliefs, self-concept can be altered through self-perception as well as feedback from significant others in an individual's environment (Byrne, 1984).

Together with feedback received, participants' assessed themselves and, in some cases, internalised their writing abilities as being part of, or as a result of, who they were. In some instances, this self-evaluation was negative. For example, Participant 7 explained the difficulties with grammar and sentence construction pointed out by his superior at work as being the result of a shortcoming in his character:

...I am a person who sometimes get easily distracted so sometimes I leave whatever I am busy with when something distracts me. This character seems to affect my sentences because I sometimes write half sentences.

At the same time, Participant 7 viewed himself as being creative and having good ideas, so there appeared to be a conflict between this positive self-evaluation and his negative evaluation of his character shortcoming. Similarly, Participant 4 expressed a struggle between being confident and trying to improve his English and being unconfident and afraid of people. Participant 3 evaluated herself as sometimes being "lazy to think or to write" due to difficulties with vocabulary. Participants' general self-concept was therefore influenced by their difficulties with the language, consistent with research findings on self-concept (albeit with children) which suggest that while cumulative achievement is associated with a positive self-concept, the opposite is also true (Kifer, 1975, cited in Byrne, 1984, p. 442). Of

interest is the overlap between this process and the process of decreased perceived self-efficacy as a result of repeated failure (Bandura, 1977) and that although participants sometimes described themselves in negative ways, their self-efficacy beliefs remained high as evidenced by their goal-setting behaviour and perseverance in the face of difficulties.

Nonetheless, as the ability to write increased, so too did positive self-evaluations. Participant 8's experience as a language learner and how this impacted on his writing self-efficacy and self-concept is an interesting illustration of the cumulative effect of success. Initially, Participant 8 did not have many English resources at his disposal. He struggled to express himself, was negatively regarded by his peers and superiors at work and imposed self-limiting behaviours on himself to avoid embarrassment. As a result of his perceived lack of ability and negative feedback from the environment, he became "negative" about his job, "had a very low self-esteem" because he did not believe in himself, was demotivated and wanted to resign from work. The cumulative effect of repeated failures and negative feedback from his environment led to decreased self-efficacy beliefs and an increasingly negative self-concept.

This changed when he made the decision to enrol for a language course. Learning the language allowed him to write effectively, which was noticed by his peers and superiors. Repeated positive feedback (recognition from his boss and promotion to a position of more responsibility) as well as success in writing mastery experiences led to an increased perception of self-efficacy as well as the significantly more positive self-concept described as his ability to express himself with confidence and transform his perceived weaknesses into strengths. Mastering writing skills and being promoted at work as a result led to Participant 8's evaluation of himself as a competent writer and effective communicator.

4.2.4.2 Educational Experience Has Limited Abilities

An integral part of the way in which many participants identified themselves was through their experience of being an English second language learner, particularly in relation to the previous education system. This was succinctly summed up by one participant:

I attended school and passed my matric before the democratic South Africa. I am a product of Bantu Education, negatively affected by racial laws of the Apartheid government. I found myself in English classes that were conducted by teachers who were not English Practitioners. (Participant 6)

Two other participants related their difficulties with English as adults to their primary and high school English experiences of learning English as a second language:

I have studied at disadvantage school where English was not used everyday. Everything was done through mother tongue. It was difficult because some of the words was difficult even to write them in English. I was ashamed to express myself through medium of English. It was difficult to construct a sentence. (Participant 4)

I attended primary and high school at a local government school where English was taught as a second language. Learning English as a second language had a negative impact on my tertiary academic performance and on my career as there were time when I had to present my ideas using verbal communication. Those were the most difficult moment for me because I had great ideas and I was working very hard to make sure that I understand the learning material, but it was difficult to express myself using the English language [...] My home language has been dominant throughout my whole life which makes it difficult to think in my home language and speedily process it into English. (Participant 8)

Participant 1, who did not attend school in South Africa, also noted that “...*English is linked to school, there are few opportunities to do English without a study purpose.*” It is clear that an educational background with English as a second language in primary and high school has made writing in English all the more difficult as an adult. In addition, a disadvantaged educational background with under-qualified teachers who themselves were likely to have struggled with English is linked with negative writing experiences. While two participants framed their backgrounds as disadvantaged, one participant conceptualised himself as a second language speaker which then became a frame for his difficulties with writing in and using English.

Of great interest is that two participants who specifically commented on their disadvantaged educational background and the difficulties this created for them as adults using English to write and speak also made explicit reference to fear and anxiety related to expressing themselves for an audience of educated people. It may be possible to conclude that such a disadvantaged educational background has been incorporated into the self-concept, which expresses itself as a sense of heightened awareness of differences in

education. However, although both participants expressed negative affective states of fear and anxiety, in terms of both self-efficacy and self-concept, the comparison could be used as a means of self-evaluation to set goals for further development (Bandura, 1982; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Thesen (1997) comments that in South Africa, the description of 'second language speaker' is an institutional label that signifies a historically disadvantaged background. In Starfield's (2002) study, the student who failed his essay through being unable to establish an authoritative academic voice identified himself with this label to explain and accept his failure.

This is in direct contrast to the participants in this study. Although some of the participants have assimilated the descriptions of 'disadvantaged' and 'second language speaker' into their personal narratives as a way of making sense of their experiences in learning and writing English (Markus & Wurf, 1987), this aspect of their identity is much weaker than the aspects of identity linked to their beliefs about their self-efficacy in terms of their English knowledge and writing development. Aspects of participants' identities therefore appeared to both rest on the self-conception of having been disadvantaged as well as resist this self-conception through perseverance and goal setting. In addition, there is a further theme related to perseverance and goal setting that runs through participants' autobiographies that goes some way towards mitigating participants' negative educational experiences.

4.2.4.3 Limitations Can Be Overcome

Despite having had educational experiences that have limited participants' abilities and resulted in a sometimes negative self-evaluation, this was offset to a certain extent by an apparent implicit recognition of limitations as areas for improvement. In this way, participants' self-construction shifts from that of a disadvantaged second language speaker to that of an active second language learner. This was expressed in goals that participants had, their recognition of what they would like to achieve and what needed to be done in order to accomplish this.

This ties in with the themes of perseverance and knowledge of self as allowing for change discussed previously but incorporates an added dimension of what appears to be faith in one's learning process, faith in the ability to overcome obstacles and faith in continued improvement through education as the ultimate way of overcoming limitations, despite being let down by previous educational experiences:

I was afraid to show my friends and my parents [a letter that had been written asking for financial assistance] but there was something in my mind and even in my spirit that one day I will be in the class studying and following my dream career. (Participant 4)

By reading and listening English I slowly acquire classic expression and adopt them. I believe that my 9 month in South Africa will definitively set up my English writing. (Participant 1)

I can now write and I also believe in my writing although I am strangling [struggling] with spelling but I believe if [I] persevere my spelling will be good. (Participant 3)

I took this English class/course to improve my vocabulary and paragraph phrasing or re-phrasing. (Participant 6)

After I got my first job, I applied for study assistance at the company I am working for and they approved my application. I registered for [an English course]. That was the best career choice I have ever made. [...] I always laugh at myself when I think about how terrible my writing was back then. I am so proud of myself for being able to identify my weakness and work on it. (Participant 8)

In all of the above quotes, participants expressed belief. Participant 4 expressed belief that education would be instrumental in creating a career, Participant 1 expressed belief that spending time in a country where he could be surrounded by English would “definitively” establish his writing skills, Participant 3 expressed belief in her writing as well as in the value of perseverance, Participant 6 expressed an implicit belief that the English course he took would help him improve his skills and Participant 8 expressed a general belief in learning and in his ability to transform his perceived weaknesses into strengths.

Another way in which faith in the learning process was expressed was in the view of mistakes as a learning experience. Two participants expressed the ability to learn from their mistakes as a strength from which their writing benefits as opposed to being a possible source of shame. In their second writing autobiographies, two of the participants also reflected that they had made progress and noted further areas for improvement. Their overall attitudes towards themselves appear to be as works in progress and they are in a

steady state of recognising and working on their writing issues, demonstrating faith in themselves and their ability to do this.

Belief in the self and in elements in the environment is an important motivator of behaviour (Bandura, 1977; Bong & Clark, 1999). In addition, findings by Bandura and Schunk (1981) indicate that self-belief is related to perseverance. Although this finding was in children, and related to mathematics, it is possible to see the link between the beliefs held by participants in this study and their motivation. Participant 4 was motivated to request financial assistance to continue studying, Participant 1 was motivated to immerse himself in English, Participant 3 was motivated to persevere with spelling even though it was characterised as a struggle, Participant 6 was motivated to take English classes in order to improve his skills in certain areas and Participant 8 was motivated to learn and transform his weaknesses into strengths.

Motivation and faith in one's capabilities to achieve one's goals would appear to be inextricably intertwined. Mistakes did not demotivate participants but were incorporated into the learning process as a result of the belief that participants had in their ability to learn. The ultimate belief that participants expressed in their writing autobiographies was that their perceived limitations could be overcome, particularly as expressed in participants' recognition of their ability to learn (Zimmerman, 2000) and which manifested itself in participant's return to the classroom as an adult.

4.2.4.4 Summary of Global Theme: Resilience

The concepts that clustered around the global theme of *Resilience* revealed three aspects of participants' attitudes towards and evaluation of themselves as writers and as English language learners. The first idea concerned participants' self-evaluation as being based on their writing abilities, in which limitations led to lowered self-esteem while writing effectively led to a sense of pride. Writing abilities were strongly linked to the second aspect of the global theme, namely that previous educational experience was instrumental in determining abilities as well as a construction of the self as a second language speaker. This was offset by the third aspect of the theme which illuminated a belief that limitations can be

overcome, particularly through a process of learning and improving. All these aspects work together to construct a self-concept characterised by resilience, commitment to improvement and a tenacity of spirit in the face of sometimes overwhelming odds.

4.3 The Construction of Identity as Writer

Based on an exploration of the thematic networks, it would appear that participants' identities as writers are, unsurprisingly, multifaceted and that self-perception, self-efficacy and self-concept do not have discrete boundaries but instead overlap, bleed into and form part of each other. Identities are presented and represented in the texts that are written. The text itself is the vehicle for participants' desire to communicate their thoughts, feelings and ideas.

The text is also a concrete representation of the abstractions of ideas and ability as well as appearing to be the catalyst for identity construction. As a concretisation, the text allows the writer's stage of writing development to be recognised both by the writer and by the audience. The writer is able to draw certain conclusions about themselves in terms of their self-perceptions, self-efficacy and self-construct as a writer, which is based on the experience of writing the text as well as the experience of the text itself. This is either challenged or confirmed by the audience, which allows writers to draw further conclusions about themselves as writers, which then has an effect on their view of themselves, their self-efficacy and their self-concept and which will have an impact on the experience of writing, and the text itself, in the future. Overall, participants in this study appeared to construct themselves as second-language writers in the process of overcoming obstacles through hard work, continued learning and effort whilst steadily moving towards writing proficiency and adept English usage.

The findings of this study overlap to some extent with the findings of other studies on identity as writer, particularly those of Fernsten (2008) and Simpson (2009). As such, areas of identity conflict are seen, together with similar areas of frustration for participants in both studies. As with Simpson's study, this study also found themes related to writers as agents of their own learning and writing as an individual and social representation of

meaning. Where this study diverges from others in the field is in its sample, the texts written by participants and in the strong presence of self-efficacy beliefs. In fact, Albert Bandura's theory of self-efficacy was extremely powerful in explaining many aspects of participants' viewpoints and behaviour, and themes extrapolated from the data were of use in adding further dimensions to the theory in terms of writing in a South African context.

In conclusion, this chapter has presented the findings of the study as well as how the findings related to other studies on identity as writer as well as the theoretical constructs of self-perception, self-efficacy and self-concept. The following chapter will present an overall conclusion to the study, including limitations and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarises the main points of the study and presents overall conclusions based on the findings and discussion of the previous chapter. Included are some of the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for further research.

5.1 Aim and Findings of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate how adults with English as a second or additional language perceived and constructed themselves as writers in English, utilising the qualitative research method of thematic content analysis. Unlike other studies in this area that have focused on the construction of an academic writing identity at university, the main focus of this study was on adults' writing identities and experiences of writing a variety of texts in a variety of contexts. Ultimately, the study aimed to elucidate how participants viewed their identity as a writer of English texts.

The first research question sought to uncover participants' attitudes to writing in English. Analysis of the data elicited a theme of *Writing is a public (re)presentation of individual meaning and ability* in which participants viewed writing as a way of representing their thoughts, feelings, ideas, knowledge and abilities. The second question aimed to reveal participants' self-perceptions as writers. The theme that emerged in response to this question was that of *Not yet competent*. Participants perceived their limitations in writing in English but were also able to perceive an ideal skill set towards which they could strive. The third question related to participants' perception of their abilities as writers. Analysis of the data showed that participants believed that *Ability is based on personal effort*. Through perseverance, participants were able to learn and improve their abilities as writers in English. The fourth question sought to elicit participants' attitudes to themselves as writers. The theme that emerged in response to this question was *Resilience*. Although participants

had been limited by their lack of English and educational background, they still believed in their ability to overcome their perceived limitations.

As demonstrated by the four global themes that arose from the data, it was found that participants viewed themselves, and constructed their identities, in a multiplicity of ways. Although participants were aware of their limitations and areas of weakness in their English writing based on their own self-appraisal as well as feedback from the environment, they also held a clear belief in their ability to overcome their limitations. The theory of self-efficacy was a powerful explanation for many themes that emerged from the writing autobiographies, forming an integral part of and supporting the self-concept. Further research into the self-efficacy beliefs of adult learners of English as a second language would be of great value in understanding the phenomenon of the lifelong learner in South Africa.

5.2 Limitations of the Study and Recommendations

One of the main limitations of the study is the size of the sample. Eight students took part, but additional writing autobiographies may have brought to light additional themes and strengthened the current themes that emerged from the writing autobiographies used. Nonetheless, the question prompts in the first writing autobiography did yield a sufficiently rich data set from which a number of important and instructive themes arose and which illuminated the unique experiences of South African adult writers in English.

The rate of attrition between the first and second writing autobiographies also limited the study. As there were only two complete second writing autobiographies, no new themes could be extrapolated from these. One reason for the limited response to the second writing autobiography may be related to the questions asked. It is possible that participants did not want to comment on their experience of the course directly. A more plausible reason for why only three participants elected to do the second writing autobiography is related to the ethics of the study. The second time I approached each class to distribute the second writing autobiography, I discussed the participants' information sheet again. I was at great pains to emphasise the entirely voluntary nature of the study, perhaps inadvertently creating the perfect context for attrition. The second writing autobiography was distributed

in the penultimate week of the course and so I was only able to see each class twice more to enquire whether there were any responses to collect. As the first writing autobiography was distributed nearer the beginning of the course, participants had a longer period in which to compose their writing autobiographies and return them. Future research should rather have one set of questions administered at one chosen point with enough time for participants to respond and for follow-up to be conducted. Even though the second writing autobiography did not yield any further themes, the content of those that were received somewhat added to the themes extrapolated from the first writing autobiography. More heartening was the change in tone between the first and second writing autobiographies, which indicated that some positive changes had taken place for at least three of the participants.

A further limitation of the study was the age of some of the references, most notably with regard to the aspects of identity under scrutiny. However, research into the various identity constructs of self-efficacy, self-perception and self-concept appeared to be most popular in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. Nonetheless, the constructs themselves are stable. In the case of self-efficacy in particular, there is a vast body of research in a wide variety of contexts that supports and confirms Bandura's original theory.

An additional limitation is related to the sampling technique. Purposive sampling was used precisely because I wished to discern the writing identities of adult students doing a particular course. However, the findings around the themes of *Not yet competent*, *Ability is based on personal effort* and *Resilience* may possibly be seen as intuitive considering that these participants have returned to education as adults. However, the fact that participants returned to education as adults can simultaneously be seen as a physical manifestation and powerful confirmation of the thoughts, feelings and ideas which were expressed in the writing autobiographies and from which these themes were extrapolated.

Perhaps the biggest limitation to the entire study is in terms of how I may have viewed participants through their writing autobiographies. This awareness is based on Linda Harklau's (2000) insightful study of identity change as a result of external positioning. In order to avoid this, I have attempted to be as rigorous as possible in terms of the data analysis and as faithful as possible to the voices of the participants. In addition, there has been on-going consultation with the research supervisors of this study, which has provided

a more impartial point of view. Nonetheless, I would recommend further studies of this nature, particularly with regard to the self-efficacy beliefs of adult ESL writers in South Africa, with more than one researcher so that triangulation between researchers is possible. This would also enhance the overall richness and satisfaction of the research experience itself.

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Appendix A: Research Information Sheet and Research Consent Form – Institution

Dear Sir

Request for permission to conduct research at [name of language school]

I am writing to you as the Director of [name of language school], an institution which I hope will become involved in a research project related to the exploration of how South African adult English as a Second Language (ESL) short-course students' perceive/construct their identity-as-writer in English. This letter serves to introduce the research I intend to carry out and to request your permission to conduct research at your institution.

I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining a Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand but I hope that the findings of my research will also be useful for English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers of adult students in South Africa. My area of focus for this research study is on the identity-as-writer of adult English language learners in South Africa. Research will involve requesting students who wish to participate in the study to compose a writing autobiography at the beginning of one of the short English courses offered at [name of school]. After the course, research will be conducted to assess the impact of the short course on students' self-perception as writers through a second writing autobiography.

For the purpose of this research, I require access to students who attend the English classes on Saturday mornings at [name of school]. With their consent and yours, I will be able to collect data required for this research. Data collection will involve a during- and post-course writing autobiography, i.e. a written piece by students that detail their experiences and perceptions of themselves as writers in English.

The participants will be provided with the details and aims of the research as listed in the second paragraph (above) and will be required to provide their written consent to participate in the research. Participation in the research is voluntary and participants may choose to withdraw from the research at any time should they wish to do so, without any prejudice to them. The research will be conducted confidentially and the anonymity of participating individuals will be ensured. All participants and participating institutions are encouraged to contact me regarding the findings of the research.

Your assistance in granting me permission to conduct research at [name of school] would be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Sanchia Slater

Institution Informed Consent Form - Research

I give consent for this institution to participate in the research study on the identity-as-writer of South African adult English as a Second Language (ESL) short course students which is being conducted by Sanchia Slater.

In giving consent, I am not guaranteeing that the students will participate. The participation of the students is voluntary and their decision to participate in the research or not will have no bearing on their work, study or participation in the course.

The students and the institution may withdraw their consent at any time.

Director's Name:

Signature:

Researcher's Name: Sanchia Slater

Researcher's Signature:

Appendix B: Writing Autobiography Information Sheet – Participant

12 October 2012

Dear Student

My name is Sanchia Slater and I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining a Master of Arts degree at the University of the Witwatersrand as well as with the aim of contributing to the development of knowledge in the field of writing in English as a second language.

Although I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining a degree, I also hope that the findings of my research will be useful for English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers of adult students in South Africa. My area of focus for this research study is on the identity-as-writer of adult English language learners in South Africa. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

Participation in this research will involve writing about your experiences as a writer in English up to now in response to three questions, and then writing about how you see yourself as a writer in response to four questions at the end of the course. The first piece of writing will take a couple of hours to complete; writing about how you see yourself as a writer at the end of the course will also take a couple of hours to complete.

[Name of school] has given permission for this research to proceed; however, your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not, will not affect teaching and learning throughout the course. You may choose to withdraw consent or discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. You can say no or stop participating at any time without any consequences.

The information supplied in your writing will remain confidential as far as possible and the anonymity of participating individuals will be ensured. Your writing will only be processed by myself. I will need to make a photocopy of your writing (without any identifying details) so that I can make notes on it. This photocopy will be stored securely when I am not working with it so that no one who is unauthorised will have access to it. You are most welcome to have your original writing back so that you can keep it for your records. Once I have finished working with the photocopies, I will scan them and store them safely as password protected computer files so as to ensure no one who is unauthorised will have access to your writing.

Although I will request that you put your name on the cover sheet of the writing autobiography (which I request that you return to me), as soon as I receive your writing, I will take off the cover sheet and write a participant number on your writing. I will link this participant number to your name on a separate document on my computer. I will then destroy the cover sheet so that there is no link between your personal details and what you have written. During the study, I will need to keep a record of your name just in case I need to ask for clarity on something you have written and also to link the first and second pieces of writing. Once the study is complete, I will delete the document that links your name to your number.

Should there be any information that you would not like to disclose in your writing, you may choose not to answer any questions you do not want to.

My research supervisors may request to see the writing that I have collected for this research study. However, I will ensure that there are no identifying details on any of the texts that my supervisors may see. I am also required to include a data sample (writing texts) as an appendix with my research report. Again, I will ensure that there are no identifying details on any of the texts that may be included in the appendix. I will retype your writing and will change any identifying details in the text. In addition, the examiner(s) of my research report may request to see the writing I collected. I will ensure that there are no identifying details on any of the texts that the examiner(s) may request.

On completion of the research, I will make a copy of the results available on request – you are encouraged to contact me to find out the results of the study.

If you choose to participate in this study, please complete the consent form provided. Once you have given your consent on the consent form, please answer the guiding questions for your writing as carefully and honestly as possible. Once you have completed your writing, please place it in the envelope provided and return it to me.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need any further information. My contact details are below.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Sanchia Slater

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form - Participant

I(name) agree to participate in the study on adult English as a Second Language short course participants' identity-as-writer. I understand that my participation involves writing two pieces (writing autobiographies) about my experience as a writer in English during and at the end of the course for which I am enrolled.

I understand that

- Participation in this study is voluntary and will have no bearing on the course for which I am enrolled.
- I am free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice (i.e. I can stop at any time without any consequences).
- My writing tasks will form part of the research data.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report and my participation in the study will remain confidential as far as possible.

Participant's Signature:

Researcher's Name: Sanchia Slater

Researcher's Signature:

Appendix D: During Course Writing Autobiography

First writing autobiography

Part 1: Writing Autobiography Questions

Please answer the questions below as fully and completely as possible on the paper provided. You can use as many or as few pages as you wish in your answers. Please attach this page to your writing and put your writing into the envelope provided.

1. Think of a few specific times in your life when writing in English was a positive experience. Please describe two of those times in as much detail as you can. What were the writing tasks, reasons for writing and the circumstances? What are some of the factors that make writing a positive experience for you?
2. Describe some negative writing experiences you have had. Think of some times when writing in English was difficult, frustrating and unsatisfying. Please describe two of those times in as much detail as you can. What are some of the factors that make writing in English a negative experience for you?
3. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer in English? What experiences have led you to believe that you have these strengths and weaknesses?

Part 2: Personal Information

Please complete the following information. (This information is for data management only and will not be shared with anyone. Your identity will remain confidential.)

1. Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Home language: _____

Appendix E: End of Course Writing Autobiography

End of course writing autobiography

Part 1: Writing Autobiography Questions

Please answer the questions below as fully and completely as possible on the paper provided. You can use as many or as few pages as you wish in your answers. Please attach this page to your writing and put your writing into the envelope provided.

1. What have you learned during the course about your ability as a writer in English? (In your answer, you could consider your own experience with writing in English and your identity / how you see yourself as a writer.)
2. How, specifically, do you think your writing has improved?
3. What areas of your writing do you think still need work?
4. Do you feel any differently about yourself as a writer in English now than you did before the course? Why or why not?

Part 2: Personal Information

Please complete the following information. (This information is for data management only and will not be shared with anyone. Your identity will remain confidential.)

1. Name: _____

Appendix F: Ethical Clearance Form



Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON MEDICAL)

H120931 Slater

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**PROTOCOL NUMBER H120931****PROJECT TITLE**An analysis of English as a Second Language (ESL)
short-course students' identities as writers**INVESTIGATOR(S)**

Ms S H Slater

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT

Applied English Language Studies

DATE CONSIDERED

21 September 2012

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved Unconditionally

EXPIRY DATE

30 September 2014

DATE 15 October 2012**CHAIRPERSON**

(Professor T Milani)

cc: Dr. D Mwepu

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

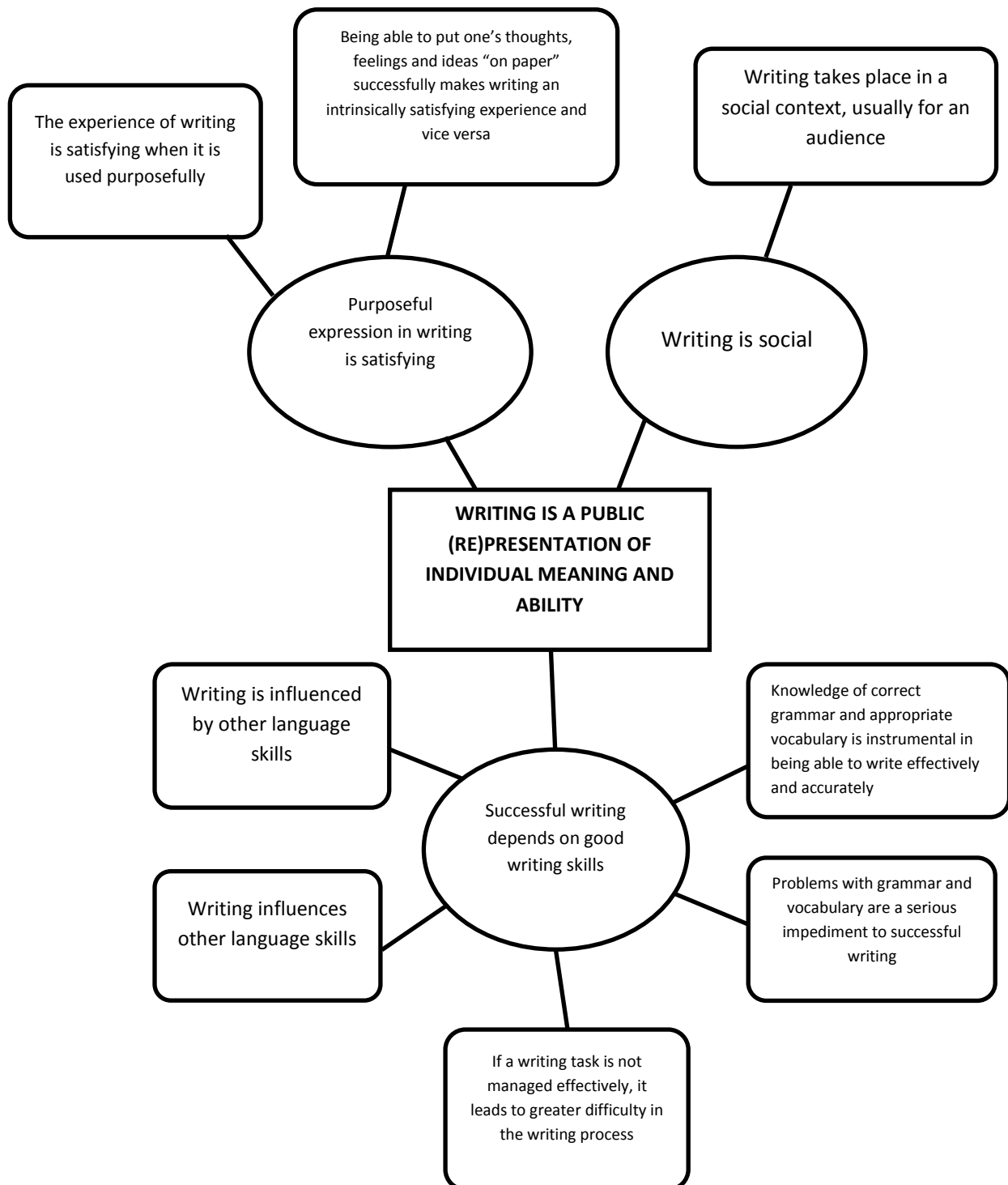
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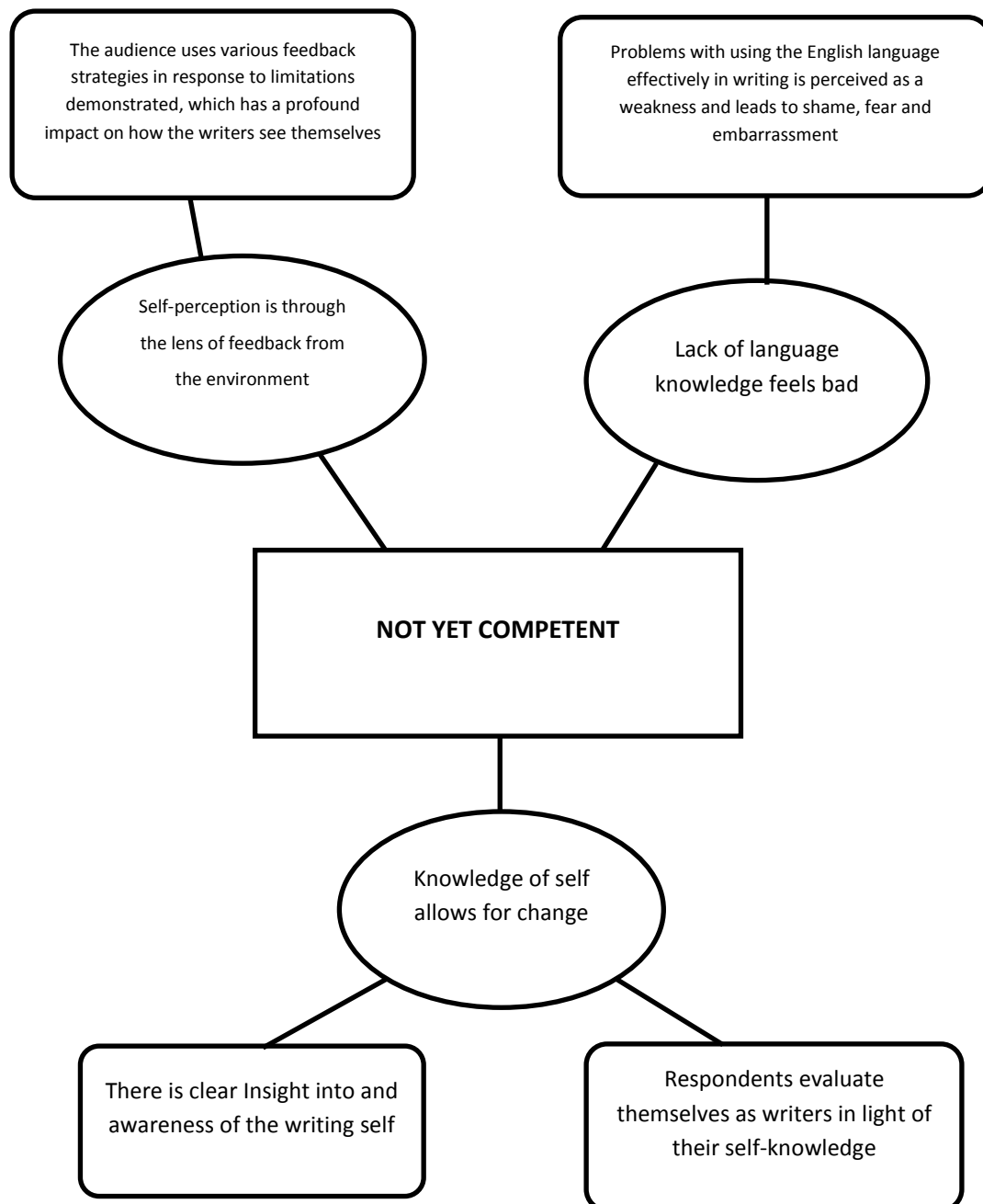
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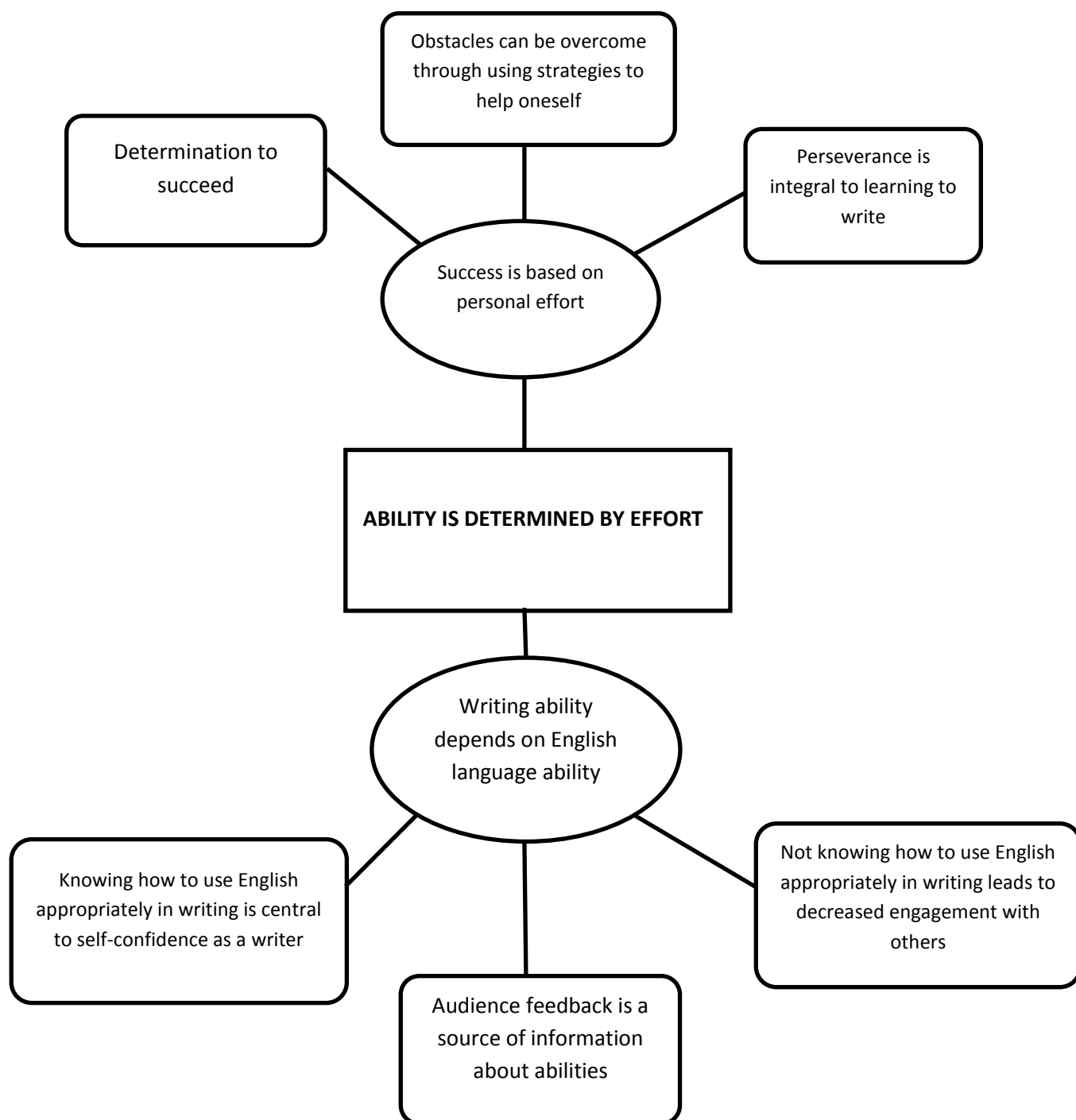
02, 11, 2012

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix G: Thematic Network: Writing is a public (re)presentation of individual meaning and ability



Appendix H: Thematic Network: Not yet competent

Appendix I: Thematic Network: Ability is determined by effort

Appendix J: Thematic Network: Resilience



Appendix K: Sample of Labels (adapted from Boyatzis, 1998)

LABEL / IDENTITY CONSTRUCT	KEY QUOTE	DEFINITION	INDICATORS	EXCLUSIONS	DIFFERENTIATION
Inductive Label 1: Perseverance in the face of difficulties / obstacles <u>Identity Aspect</u> Self-Efficacy in terms of persevering; self-concept in terms of being determined	"The fact that I cannot spell it does not mean that I should stop writing." (2) "I told myself that without trying, you cannot know a thing." (4)	Respondent describes or talks about overcoming a weakness, working on an area of difficulty, identifying a weakness and showing a commitment to work on / overcome it; not letting an area of weakness / obstacle stop them from writing / expressing themselves / moving forward	<u>Positive</u> : Coded when the person speaks about trying, persevering, working on something, overcoming something (with the understanding of getting something right). <u>Negative</u> : Coded when the person speaks about not letting a weakness stop them from doing something or a negative version of needing to try in order to be able to learn something (i.e. without trying, you cannot know a thing)		Respondents 2-8 show it
Inductive Label 2: Issues with words 1: Spelling <u>Identity Aspect</u> Self-Efficacy in terms of being unable to spell; self-perception in terms of it being a weakness	"My weakness is spelling..." (1) "I have a big problem with my spelling. It is one of the things that make writing to be difficult for me." (2)	Respondent describes or talks about spelling as a problem or has difficulty with or uncertainty about spelling	Coded when spelling is talked about as a problem, a weakness or a struggle		Respondents 1-4 show it; Respondents 5-8 do not
Inductive Label 7: Own strategies for dealing with limitations in English <u>Identity Aspect</u> Self-efficacy in terms of persevering; self-concept in terms of	"...by transforming a bit French words, I can find the English word close..." (1)	Respondent describes or talks about an alternative way of reaching the same desired outcome, asks for help or uses current or prior knowledge to reach intended outcome	Coded when an explicit strategy, e.g. substituting words, asking for help, consulting resources, checking words for similarities, taking care with work, is described	Attendance at English course or language school	Respondents 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 show it; Respondents 7, 4 do not

being determined, innovative					
Deductive Label 43: Positive performance contexts <u>Identity</u> <u>Aspect</u> Self-efficacy	“The experience that have led me to believe that I have the strengths: are when I wrote poems and people enjoyed my poems.” (3)	Respondent describes or refers to a context in which writing was either a good experience or led to a positive outcome	Coded when respondent refers to a particular text or writing situation and links it with a positive emotion, evaluation or outcome		Respondents 1-5, 8 show it; Respondents 6, 7 do not
Deductive Label 47: Effort <u>Identity</u> <u>Aspect</u> Self-efficacy	“I tried to find as much information as I could get.” (3)	Respondent talks about putting effort into writing tasks, either past or present	Coded when respondents explicitly refer to effort they have put into writing, or learning or trying		Respondents 2, 3, 4, 8 show it; Respondents 1, 5, 6, 7 do not
Deductive Label 48: Self-evaluation <u>Identity</u> <u>Aspect</u> Self-concept	“My English was not good.” (4) “The strength I have, I think, is that I am creative and have original ideas.” (7)	Respondent makes a self-evaluative statement regarding skills or abilities in writing in English	Coded when a self-evaluative statement is made, in terms of a description that contains an evaluative component		Respondents 3, 4, 7, 8 show it; Respondents 1, 2, 5, 6 do not

Appendix L: Sample Writing Autobiography

Times When Writing In English Was a Positive experience

I attended primary and high school at a local government school where English was taught as a second language. Learning English as a second language had a negative impact on my tertiary academic performance and on my career as there were time when I had to present my ideas using verbal communication. Those were the most difficult moment for me because I had great ideas and I was working very hard to make sure that I understand the learning material, but it was difficult to express myself using the English language. Even though writing in English was my weakness, but I did not let it stop me from progressing with my studies.

After I got my first job, I applied for study assistance at the company I am working for and they approved my application. I registered for the English []² course at [a language school]. That was the best carrer {career} choice I have ever made.

Knowing how to speak and write in English is one of the things that gives me confidence when I am speaking with people in general and colleagues. After I had finished the first level [at the language school], I made sure that I practice my writing skills as much as I could. One day my boss asked a question on email and she was totally impressed with my response. She called me to her office and asked how did my English [] course go. I told her it went well that I would go to the next level. She asked me to take a seat and told me the reason she called me to her office. She told me was impressed with the my writing has improved. I proceeded to the next level of the English [] course.

I will never forget the day when I was given a task to draft a process document of procedures that was going to be sent to all the brands that my company owns. The document did not have even a single error which made my boss realise that I was ready to be promote from being an assistant coordinator to a full-time coordinator.

Being able to write and speak English and combining it with skills I {struck out: have} has learnt at tertiary have enabled me to express my ideas with confidence. It has made it easier for me to be able to interprete different form of communication. Knowing my weaknesses is good because it helps to do something to overcome them and convert them into my straights {strengths}. Even though I am not yet the most effective communicator in writing and speaking English, I am happy that I can do my with confidence and write letters to people at all levels of profession. Unlike before, I now know the difference between formal and informal language.

I remember there was a time when I didn't know the difference between has and have, under and below, and next and near. My excuse was that English is not my first language which was a very weak one because I had a choice to work on it at an early stage. I regret saying that because it disadvantaged me in many ways. Knowing how to write English is not about using big or fancy words but it's about knowing the basics and rules then, the rest follows.

Even though there has been more than one time when writing in English was a positive experience, but the ones that I have mentioned above are those that stood out most for me because they led me to where I am today and pave a way for my carrer {career}. I always laugh at myself when I think

² Square brackets indicate the removal of identifying information for purposes of anonymity.

about how terrible my writing was back then. I am so proud of myself for being able to identify my weakness and work on it.

Times When Writing In English Was a Negative Experience

There were times when I felt like writing in English was not only difficult but frustrating and unsatisfying for me. Not being able to use the language led me to not being able to do things I wanted to try to do because I did not want to embarrass myself in front of my peers. It created more barriers between me and the peer I wanted to associate with. I remember the day I was asked a question on email at work where I had to respond immediately but was very frustrated because I could not find the appropriate words to use to respond which resulted in great frustration.

There was a time when one of my colleague used to correct my grammar usage every time before I send emails out to external people. By not being able to write English had an impact on my performance and made my boss and some of my colleagues to start asking questions about my educational background. Many of my colleagues started to look down upon me and did not consider me as being competent and some of them doubted my ability to do my job. These were the hardest days of my career {career}. I started trying to improve on my writing skills but it was not good enough because I was doing it on my own under enormous pressure from my boss as he was not pleased with the way in which I was writing.

The reader may have noticed that I keep mentioning how important it is to speak English and write it while the topic is not about speaking English. It is not easy to write in English if you cannot speak it. I had a problem with word choice when speaking and writing which made people to laugh at me when I was talking. The most frustrating part was when I talk and while I am still talking someone conclude a sentence for me.

As a result of not being able to write English, I had a negative attitude towards my job, I was over careful and end up spending more time on one thing, I had a very low self-esteem because I was not believing in myself anymore, I wanted to quit my job, I used to be upset very easy and lost motivation.

The English course I took at [the language school] helped me to improve on my writing skills. The course saved my job and opened many doors for me.

My Strengths {Strengths} And Weaknesses As a Writer In English

One of the strengths {strengths} I have as a writer in English is that I know my weaknesses and I always try to work on them. Even though I have succeeded {succeeded} to improve on some of my weaknesses, but there's still more work that needs to be done in terms of consistency in my writing. I also would be happiest if I can improve on choosing more appropriate words when writing and speaking in English.

Amongst the strengths {strengths} that I have as a writer in English is that I am effective communicator. I have never liked using slang when I'm writing. I stick to the basics and the rules. I can distinguish between formal and informal language which I think is what makes me an improved

writer in English. I always try not to use word that I am not familiar with because I know that one word can change the entire mean in a sentence.

English is the most difficult language. I am still struggling to a little to use the right words when I am writing in English. I see this as a weakness that I have to work on in order for me to be able to get things right the first time. I always try as much as I possibly can to read widely and consult as many grammar book that I can find which has been very helpful.

My home language has been dominant throughout my whole life which makes it difficult to think in my home language and speedily process it into English.