

Changing Participation and Identity in Writing Transition: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the changing participation and identity in the writing transition of English as a Second Language (ESL) students from secondary school to pre university and to higher education from a sociocultural theory perspective. The data for this study was obtained from interviews, personal narratives, class observations and samples of students' essays. The students were followed for a period of one and a half year. The findings reveal that in learning to write in the different cultures of writing, the students participated in different ways as demonstrated by their changing identity throughout the transition process. The students constantly reinvented their self or identity in order to participate in the different writing cultures. Their different participation and identity were attributed to their agency: personal histories, different motives which influenced their writing. Their histories also played a role in how well they participated in writing. This study contributes to the understanding of the learning of writing as a form of participation in which students have the power, i.e. agency to act and react in certain ways and the identity they form in writing has a bearing on their writing success.

Keywords: *writing transition, sociocultural theory, identity*

INTRODUCTION

Malaysian L2 student writers moving from secondary school to pre university and to higher education face different writing expectations at the various levels. The transition from school to higher education for L2 writers can be a struggle as students learn these diverse writing expectations (Lee, Lee, Siti Hamin & Saadiyah, 2009; Preto-Bay. 2004). Their transition in writing is also influenced by prior knowledge, practices and assumptions of writing in school besides that of home, culture, world and classroom (Fitzgerald, 2006; Chen, 2002). Consequently, learning to write at university means that students have to create a new identity to meet the new expectations and demands of writing in university. Creating this new identity can be difficult for L2 student as their new learning experience is very different from their previous one (Hyland, 2002).

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY AND WRITER'S IDENTITY

Sociocultural theory in the Vygotskian's tradition views individual learning, culture and social interaction as closely related. It is of the perspective that human activity is goal directed and entrenched in social, cultural and historical processes. It emphasises the participation of learners in social practices of the setting, community and culture and perceives that "identity is constructed in activity" (Packer & Goicochea, 2000 in Innes 2004, p. 155). When a learner participates in an activity, there is mediation by cultural tools and artifacts. The purpose of these tools and artifacts is to help transformation and new learning. Basically, learning involves changes in social roles and relationships; resulting in change in identity. "Identity is a critical mediator of learning and that how students view themselves as learners can greatly influence how they participate in educational activities and settings ... learning is not only taking on new knowledge structures but it is about personal transformation – about becoming" (Na'ilah & Hand 2006, p. 467). The participation mentioned here involves students in negotiating an identity that they and others can accept and then, acting with their agency to participate in cultural practices in specific ways.

In the writing context, the same situation applies. When student writers participate to be a member of a (writing) community, their sense of self or identity is changed. They experience changes in their identity when they take on different roles and activities in the community (Spiliotopoulos & Carey, 2005). Their identities are defined again, transformed and new identities are formed. Identity is dynamic, produces and reproduces without ceasing over time in practical activity (Innes, 2004; Roth & Lee, 2007) and this practical activity “both presupposes and produces identity” (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 216). Understanding the concept of identity in language learning can help instructors to encourage students to learn and take part in the writing activity.

Norton (2005, p. 5) defines identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how the relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future”. This definition reflects that there is investment by language learners in that they constantly negotiate, organise and reorganise with their social world to find a sense of self which is important for the learners to visualise the future and their role in it. Norton (2006) points out that recent research in second language take the stand that identity is socioculturally constructed and to understand how language learners use target language in speaking, reading and writing, both institutional and community practices are focused on. Norton asserts that in research on language learning and identity, identity is viewed as complex and dynamic, “co-constructed in a wide variety of sociocultural relationships, and framed within particular relations of power”; and these sociocultural relationships encompass “larger institutional practices” and “practices associated with particular groups” (2006, p. 25).

Bartlett (2005) also views language learning and identity from a sociocultural perspective and takes the stand that identity is not only built by an individual, but also by how others perceive him, and more importantly, cultural artifacts are used to form identities and literacies which are new. These cultural artifacts, for example, images, symbols, discourses like labels of “gifted”, etc. are important to identity as they help or mediate in the learners’ attempt to control their behavior, cognition and emotion. The cultural artifacts can help learners to develop “figured element of identity” which can “counteract powerful social positionings” or maintain it (Bartlett, 2005, p. 3). Figured elements of identity refers to identities linked to cultures,

for example, symbols, whereas positional identity refers to the learner's position in systems of "power, hierarchy or affiliation" such as race, gender, class, age, etc.

Research in language learning, writing and identity from a sociocultural perspective has been carried out to investigate the various aspects linked to identity. The idea that identity is not static and always changes is depicted in research on language learning and identity that normally deals with transition, for example, changing life events or institutions among research participants. An example is Harklau's (2000) research on language learning and identity which shows ESL students moving from one institution (high school) to another (college). In Harklau's case, the identity formation was not positive as the students who were good in ESL classes in high school became the opposite in college. The transition of students from high school to college was strongly affected by the different construction of students' identities in the two educational settings.

The idea of identity being constructed dynamically and involving transition is also seen in Nero's (2005) study where students' self-perception was found to change over time. English learners in their first year of college in US who viewed themselves as recent immigrants and who were more comfortable and identified with the language of their native country began to feel more belonged and less of an outsider when they went to senior years. They rejected the identity given to them by the college.

Research in language learning and writing among students in higher education and how students construct their academic identities also shows that language learning and writing is a situated social practice in that, students try to participate in the disciplinary communities (Morita, 2004; Haneda, 2005; Hermerschmidt, 1999). This situatedness is another characteristic of language learning and identity.

Morita (2004) used sociocultural theory to look at how six L2 students participated and negotiated membership in a new academic community (L2 academic discourse) in a university in Canada and negotiated their identities to be in control of learning. These L2 students were taking masters in Canada and their L1 was Japanese. This research focused on open ended discussions in the language class and the findings revealed that negotiating

roles and identities was an important part of socialisation. If students did not participate actively in classroom discussion, they developed the identity of being incompetent and participation was more difficult for them. The negotiation of identity was situated in the classroom context, “social, cultural, historical, curricular; pedagogical, interactional and interpersonal context” and interrelated to students’ participation (Morita 2004, p. 596) Students remained silent for different reasons. For example, one student was silent due to the positions constructed by the student and classroom context because she lacked academic experience, life experience, theoretical knowledge and was labeled a member of a silent group. There was also conflict of power relations and competing agenda that affected language learning and identity. For example, another student was very sensitive, resisted inequality and felt she was ignored as an international student. This was linked to her resentment as a minority in Japan. She was a Korean citizen born and raised in Japan. Her agency was also limited. She could not follow one course and asked the instructor to slow down and gave more background information. She was not happy as the instructor viewed her as deficient but she identified herself as a legitimate but marginalised participant. She felt disrespected and lost motivation in that particular course.

Haneda’s (2005) research also shows that construction of identity and investment in writing is a situated social practise. Her two subjects in a Canadian university were learning Japanese writing. They composed in different ways as their ethnolinguistics background and life histories were different. They used different cultural tools and resources to participate in the ongoing community and to construct their identity, indicating past, present and future influences. Their life history, for example, their changing identities and agency impacted this participation. One student valued Japanese writing to maintain his heritage and his identity as a strong writer whereas the other valued it for his future career as a successful businessman. The L2 learners learned according to how meaningful the task was to them and not according to what their teachers wanted to teach them. In short, there was negotiation between the writer and the social world or community. He organised and reorganised himself continuously to make sense of himself and his place in the social world. This shows that identity acts as a crucial mediator of learning. The participation of students in educational activities and settings is strongly affected by their perception of themselves as learners and his personal transformation that will occur, highlighting the importance of sociocultural historical perspective in language learning and identity.

Hermerschmidt (1999) further revealed that for students in higher education, the relationship between language learning and identity is complex. Students face gap in meeting the expectations of the institution and their expectation. This can limit learning among students who are “outsiders to its culture and ways” (p. 7). Hermerschmidt studied the approach to writing of twelve students in two universities. The writing course focused on study skills approach such as grammar, spelling, oral and written skills. One student was not happy about these aspects being used to evaluate their writing.. Besides, as the students needed to follow the norms and conventions in the new academic culture, they were expected to show originality of thought, synthesise views, refer to relevant literature, etc. in their writing. As a result, one student was not happy that her contributions were not given attention whereas another felt forced to be someone else when contributing in class. The students’ experiences were ignored as institution knowledge was considered more important; therefore, they felt unimportant and did not learn. The implication is that identity is constructed in the classroom in academic settings, in this case, in academic writing. Thus, students’ experience should be valued so they can participate and transform learning actively.

The review of sociocultural theory and identity in language learning and writing gives a picture that identity involves negotiation and transformation, is situated and involves mediation. It can clarify possible tension in identity faced by the L2 students in this study in their transition in writing from secondary school to higher education.

METHODOLOGY

The two students (Ju Siang and Haziman) for this study were selected from two pre-university programmes at a public university in Malaysia. Haziman was from the pre-Teaching English as a Second Language (pre- TESL) programme and Ju Siang was from the American Credit Transfer Programme (ACTP) programme. They were 18 years old and had completed their Form Five in secondary schools and both of them obtained A2 and A1 for English in their Form Five public examination, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM).

The instruments used to obtain information for this research were four in-depth personal interviews, questionnaires and personal narratives. In addition, eight written texts were collected from each student and three observations were conducted for each programme. In the qualitative analysis of data, the students' interviews were transcribed and themes were identified to code the data. Data from personal narratives, essay samples and observation were used to triangulate the data from the interviews.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ju Siang's Participation in Writing and Negotiation of Identity in Writing Transition

Ju Siang had a poor view of his writing competency when he was in his mission secondary school which placed a high importance in English. He was from a Chinese primary school, spoke Mandarin at home and was "very Chinese". He felt insecure and inferior in comparison to his peers and commented, "My friends are good since young ... everyone in class is so good in their essays" (Personal interview 1). He viewed his writing as "lame and not bombastic" and attempted to copy and memorise bombastic words and sentence structures which he did not understand to participate in the writing activity. The desire to participate and excel in writing also drove him to exert his agency to practise writing an essay everyday before his SPM exam. His attempts paid off as his English essays improved greatly. He felt good and grew confident of himself and his writing competency. He said, "Little that I know the essays I produced were decent essays" (Personal interview 1). However, he was not entirely confident with his own writing ability. He was joyful at getting A1 for his SPM English but at the same time, he was shocked to get A1 too for his GCE 1119 writing. He expected the former but not the latter. "I was just shocked that I was good. You know, score an A1 cause it's 1119" (Personal interview 1).

When Ju Siang went to semester one pre-university, he still had some misgivings over his ability to write. He believed his writing was not expressive in spite of obtaining excellent results in Form 5 English. It was only after he received praise from his lecturer and got excellent marks for his first journal entry that he displayed greater confidence in writing. He considered his high scores "as a big accomplishment" (Personal narrative 1).

He rationalised this could be because his work stood out among those whose English was not as good as his. He was called a “banana” (a Chinese who excels in English) by his Chinese educated peers in pre-university who were shocked to discover that he was Chinese educated too. His encounter with these friends who were less competent than him helped him to further find a place for himself in writing in first semester. He described himself, “... my thoughts flowed naturally and the confidence of writing sprouted” (Personal narrative 2). He was writing and editing better, faster and more fluently at this point and was certain of his competency. He only needed to edit three to four times now compared to “zillion times” previously in secondary school before he was happy with his writing.

He participated in factual writing but not fully as he disliked it. At this point, he was confident enough to disregard writing concepts in the mistaken belief that his “good content” would suffice. His writing marks were downgraded and he decided to follow the expected conventions of writing in pre-university. He had two different identities: one that loved expressive writing and another that disliked factual writing at the same time. Thus, although Ju Siang perceived himself as being more capable in writing, he also indicated clearly that at the end of the semester, he was still adjusting to being interested in writing factual essays after his experience with secondary school writing. He likened it to “climbing up a slope but at this point, I was still at a plateau” (Personal interview 2). He portrayed a high sense of understanding of his own writing preference, ability and limitations.

When Ju Siang was in semester two pre-university, he was happy with his writing marks and put minimal effort into writing. His other subjects, Calculus and Computer Programming took up a large portion of his time as there were more technical and complicated. He had to put in effort and time to study them whereas writing was easier and “there’s nothing to study” (Personal narratives 3). He depicted different identities for the different subjects: worried over the difficult ones and very secured with writing. His good writing marks affirmed to him his writing ability, giving him a sense of well being about writing.

It was with the research paper that he exercised his agency greatly. He explored the topic, sourced information for writing from a variety of sources

and refined his skills at paraphrasing, synthesising, organising information and others to fulfill research conventions. He was extremely satisfied when he obtained good marks for his writing. He was astute enough to reflect and charted his growth as a writer in the following manner. “In secondary school, I write with a pencil and an eraser. In semester 1, I write with a pen and liquid paper. In semester 2, I write with a pen without liquid paper” (Personal interview 3). He simply wanted to show the transition he went through in writing, i.e. that he did less editing, corrections and rewriting over the period of time. He was more fluent, used words naturally, expressed his ideas better and in more detailed besides being able to give multiple viewpoints for an incident.

Subsequently, in first year, even though he had to write for his content based subjects, Ju Siang was very comfortable with his writing and exuded a high degree of confidence. He carried out research seriously to get good ideas for his writing as good content meant good marks. More importantly, he believed that what he learned in writing in pre-university could be adapted and extended in his writing in higher education.

Overall, Ju Siang negotiated his identity successfully in the writing transition. He, using his agency took on the challenges in writing and worked on them for his writing gains, resulting in satisfaction with his effort and constant positive transformations in his identity in the different cultures of writing.

Haziman’s Participation in Writing and Negotiation of Identity

Haziman was confident of his writing ability in secondary school. His English was better than his friends, his writing marks were high, and he was a source of reference for vocabulary in his class. His competence caused him to be complacent as he preferred to use his writing marks to gauge and chart his progress than work on his writing. However, his confidence plummeted when he obtained a C5 for his English 1119 in Form 5 although he got an A2 for SPM English. He rated his confidence as a writer at 7 before SPM but 4 after it. He confided, “... I’m still wondering why did I get the C5?” (Personal interview 1).

Following this, when Haziman entered the first semester of pre-university, he felt inferior and lost in writing. He was not interested in factual writing and went “along writing for the future plan but no zest” (Personal interview 2). He was frustrated with his grammar, his “biggest weakness”, yet he did not much further writing practices although he “desired to stop his mistakes in writing” which was rather a contradiction (Personal interview 2). He knew what should be done but he did not assert his agency over it. Nevertheless, when faced with more challenging writing concepts, topics and content, he started to read, source information, and seek his lecturer’s help. His past negative 1119 results still upset him but he gradually “regained his confidence to write in English” when he obtained good writing marks in semester one (Personal narrative 2).

When he entered semester two pre-university, he was “kinda over confident” in his writing after obtaining an A- which he expected for his semester one writing exam (Personal interview 3). Although the writing assignments in semester two were new and quite difficult to him, he “managed to tackle them” with his newfound confidence (Personal interview 3). He was also critical and perceptive that his weak areas: vocabulary, grammar and content had to be dealt with first before he could think of getting better marks. Haziman in his existing confidence portrayed a more “decisive self” in taking actions to counter these writing problems compared to his initial “inactive self” in semester one. He used writing models as examples and blogs for different viewpoints especially for his argumentative essays. He also read books, newspapers and reference books for information and to improve his vocabulary and language. Besides, he asked his friends and lecturer for advice and implemented their feedback. He was happy when his lecturer commented, “You actually can write, a lot of ideas but you need to improve in the technical aspects of writing” (Personal interview 3). He felt this appraisal indicated that, “At least, I have improved ... than last semester” (Personal interview 3). His confirmation of his improvement in his writing competence was mediated by the approval of others.

However, he became unhappy with the “lame” topics he obtained for writing. He showed resistance by missing classes and tests and by not doing or completing his assignments which impaired his marks. He blamed himself for his “tiredness” and procrastination. Towards the end of the semester,

when he realised he could fail his writing course, he tried to remedy the situation but panicked when he found he could not finish his assignments. Here, Haziman admitted responsibility and wanted to participate again in the writing activity but he was challenged by time limitation.

During this same period, he had a conflict with his lecturer who disapproved of his research topic, “Metrosexual”. Haziman went ahead with it and even did a mini survey as he strongly believed it was not a “lame topic” (Personal interview 3). This other resistance reflected contradictions with Haziman. In this case, he did not need the approval of others nor good writing marks whereas in the earlier situations, his lecturer’s approval and the fact that he could fail in writing mattered to him. At this stage, his confidence in his writing was driven by factors that were more important to him: his strong convictions of his views and his belief in his own writing competency. Therefore, even when he got C for writing which was a nightmare and frustrated him, his identity as a capable writer was still intact as he blamed his grade solely on his lazy and bored attitude towards writing.

Later on, in first year, Haziman was concerned that he was not doing enough writing to improve nor the kind of writing he expected for higher education level. He disliked the focus on content in grading as he wanted help with language too. Writing was also not easy as “having to do all the hard work [assignments] at the end” challenged him in “picking up the momentum, ‘how to’ from the previous semester, to write down something heavy” (Personal interview 4). He realised he could not “acquire academic skills overnight” and his agency came into play as he took steps to be “more [of] a degree writer” (Personal interview 4). He set aside sufficient quality time to write, looked at his friends’ work as examples and kept up with his research skills. He spent a long time reading to be more critical in his ideas, get new ideas and to see a wider picture of an issue. He also read to improve his grammar and vocabulary. He seemed to embrace writing now as seen in the actions he took to write well. This was vastly different from his resistance in the later part of semester two pre-university.

Nevertheless, he was aware of his limitations as a writer in first year. “I’m scared, my fundamentals of writing is not that good. When you pursue degree now, it requires still a lot of basic solid, but mine is not. It can be considered weak like basic writing or high school writing level” (Personal

interview 4). He still had problems with “basic stuff” like simple tenses and felt lost when he forgot some easy words or mixed up words. He wanted to improve his grammar and writing and would like a proper writing class in the first year. As a result, he only had a sense of moderate confidence and well being as a writer at the end of first year.

In sum, Haziman’s negotiation of his writing identity in the writing transition was complex. His confidence in himself and his writing constantly fluctuated. It was enmeshed in his beliefs, sense of competence and grades or writing improvement at different times. Even though Haziman experienced insubstantial transformation in the writing transition, yet throughout, he still retained a sense of his own strengths and shortcomings.

CONCLUSION

Ju Siang’s and Haziman’s examples of negotiation of identity in their writing transition from the culture of writing in secondary school to the culture of writing in higher education indicate that “learning takes place as a result of participating in cultural and social activity” (Van Patten & Williams, 2007, p. 15). It also highlights that learning is not gradual and neutral (Norton & Toohey, 2001) but involves “personal transformation-about becoming” (Nai’lah & Hand, 2006, p. 467) from a sociocultural perspective. Specifically, with regard to writing, Prior views it as “a phenomenon that seems ever more connected to who we are and who we will become” (2006, p. 64). Hyland (2002) agrees that when a student learns to write in university, a new identity is often formed. The negotiation of identity indicates that identity is not constant especially when transition occurs (Norton, 2006; Vollmer, 2002). The students’ roles and identities in writing change in line with where they are and what activities they are involved in (Tusting, Ivancic & Wilson, 2000) as they attempt to participate in the “practices of the ongoing community” (Haneda, 2005, p. 274) in a particular activity system or culture of writing. They are constantly organising and reorganising a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (Norton, 2005, p. 11). This dynamic nature of identity is depicted for example, by Ju Siang’s description of his different identities, i.e. his different writing selves and levels of confidence in the writing transition; from writing with a pencil and an eraser in secondary school to writing with a pen and liquid paper in pre-university to writing with just a pen in higher education.

The aforementioned aspects of the negotiation of identity also denote that as it is situated in different classroom contexts or in similar contexts, a student can participate differently and negotiate identities that are varied (Morita, 2004; Haneda, 2005; Hermerschmidt, 1999). In addition, these identities can even be contradictory (Lee, 2003). As seen in Ju Siang, he negotiated different identities in pre-university writing. In the first semester, he showed a liking for expressive writing but a dislike for factual writing and in the second semester, he showed a “confident-self” for ESL writing and a “worried-self” for other subjects.

Moreover, what the students become and how they act as knowers are enmeshed in their changing modes of participation in the different writing cultures as well as in their agency and how they are reified by others (Haneda, 2005; Roth & Lee, 2007). This also implies that the students’ identity can also be defined through their nonparticipation in these same practices. These views reflect that the students’ different identities were formed in accordance to their sense of competence in writing as they tried to participate in the ongoing writing activity. In addition, the identity they constructed was also connected closely to how they were viewed by others and to factors that were important to them. These aspects are reflected in the following discussion.

The negotiation of identity in the different cultures of writing points to students’ agency in action as stated above. The students act in particular ways that reflect the social, cultural and historical construction of their agency (Lantolf, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Morita, 2004). Thus, in the different activity systems or cultures of writing, they do not only act or are involved in tasks according to the curricular or pedagogical context, but also in terms of how important and meaningful the involvement in a particular task is to them (Haneda, 2005). To illustrate, Haziman’s confidence in his writing competence and his beliefs in the importance of the issue of “metrosexual” as a research topic propelled him to disregard his lecturer’s strong disagreement with his chosen topic in semester two pre-university. Another illustration is Ju Siang whose history of writing made him dislike factual writing, especially its formal structure. He believed that content was more important than the formal structure such as thesis statement and topic sentences which he omitted from his factual essays in semester one pre-university.

With regard to the students' sense of competence and how they are viewed by others which strongly impact the construction of their identity in the writing transition, this is in agreement with Morita's (2004) and Bartlett's (2005) findings. To illustrate, when Ju Siang viewed his writing as of poorer quality than his peers in secondary school, he felt inferior and insecure. Later on, in semester one pre-university, when his writing scores were better than his peers, he felt more competent and was greatly confident. As for how the perception of others closely impact a student's construction of identity, this is seen in Haziman who was confident of himself as a writer in semester two pre-university when his lecturer commended him on his ideas and ability in writing.

Aside from these, the negotiation of identity in the writing transition is not necessarily smooth as the students try to participate in the practices of the community (Lantolf, 2001), i.e. follow the conventions of writing as they change from a particular activity system, i.e. culture of writing to another (Roth & Lee, 2007). They constantly negotiate and reconstruct their identity in their attempts to balance their personal identity with the identities of their communities of practice and institution.

The negotiation is uneasy as it involves two different phases: phase of loss and phase of recovery and reconstruction of self (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). This is seen, for example in Haziman who lost his confidence in writing after his SPM English results. Initially, there was an unraveling of self as seen in his sense of "loss of agency in the world" (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 164). Thus, he felt inferior and lost in semester one pre-university. However, he is also an agent who takes responsibility for his physical and symbolic actions to form and reform the world that other objects and agents are in. This is seen when Haziman faced more challenging writing conventions in semester one pre-university, he decided to appropriate the expected writing conventions and rules. He became more confident when his writing marks were good.

Consequently, he moved into the phase of recovery and reconstruction of self. There was appropriation of writing conventions and rules in the new writing culture, "emergence of new voice" and reconstruction of his past into a new position, i.e. a more confident self (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 162). Nevertheless, at the end of his writing transition in first year,

Haziman still depicted an incomplete recovery and reconstruction of self as he still wanted the kind of writing he did in pre-university. He indicated nonparticipation in some of the writing practices in first year. In contrast, Ju Siang displayed a more complete recovery and reconstruction of self, emerging as a confident writer from his old self, a novice writer. Haziman's incomplete recovery and reconstruction of self is tied to his personal histories; his sense of incompetency in grammar in his past (secondary school and pre-university writing) which overshadows the negotiation of new meanings of writing in his present (higher education). An example of this is Haziman's transition from semester two pre-university to first year. He found it difficult to do his assignments well because content was given priority in writing in first year. He became less confident in writing in first year compared to pre-university as he also struggled to keep up with his grammar and vocabulary which he viewed as weak. He believed they were important for his writing even though the focus was given to content in writing in first year. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) argue that such positioning is a choice that individuals make through their own intentions and agency and this choice is impacted by various factors as in Haziman's case, for example, his history with grammatical problems in writing.

Furthermore, in the uneasy negotiation of identity, the students resorted to using their inner voice to "organize self and their sense of the world" as seen with Haziman and Ju Siang who externalize their thoughts and feelings and wrote them down in their personal narratives. Vygotsky believes that inner speech manifested through personal narratives is used to "create our experiences, organize and reintegrate events that occur in time and space" (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 165).

In conclusion, the transition of writing from secondary school to pre university and to higher education involves the students in participation in an activity and constant transformation in their identity. As pointed out by Lantolf and Thorne (2007, p. 218), such "participation in culturally organized activity is essential for learning to occur".

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